STUDY OF ASSESSMENT DATA USAGE IN STUDENT AFFAIRS-RELATED

STRATEGIC PLANNING AND STUDENT LEARNING

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Malika Carter

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The Supervisory Committee certifies that this ***disquisition*** complies with

North Dakota State University's regulations and meets the accepted standards

for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

SUPERVISORY COMMITTEE:

Myron Eighmy

Chair

Nathan Wood

Claudette Peterson

Larry Peterson

Approved:

3/28/14	Myron Eighmy
Date	Department Chair

ABSTRACT

This qualitative, multiple site case study addressed five key areas (a) accountability; (b) student affairs assessment; (c) student affairs strategic planning; (d) student learning in student affairs; and (e) linkages: connectivity of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. The study drew upon semi-structured, Skype-based interviews from student affairs practitioners at institutions in six accrediting regions and by analyzing related documents. Research questions framing the study were 1) How are divisional assessment processes linked to student learning? 2) How are divisional strategic plan(s) linked to student learning? 3) How do student affairs divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment? 4) Who is involved in divisions' assessment and/or strategic planning, and what are the major responsibilities of these individuals? 5) What are common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning? Findings are illustrated across case themes and patterns and organized according to their relationship to assessment, strategic planning and student learning. Implications of this study illustrate the need to increasingly professionalize student affairs work through credentialing so that more practitioners are familiar with scholarly research and can build instruments to understand how student affairs contributes to learning. Study implications also show that professional associations and accrediting agencies can work to set techniques and outcomes that clearly demarcate student learning or, at best, the intention thereof within strategic plans and assessment documents. Lastly, the study results suggest connection of divisional funding models to drive desired outcomes of connections between assessment, strategic planning, and student learning.

Keywords: Student affairs assessment, Student affairs strategic planning, student affairs student learning.

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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Major dialogues in student affairs for the twenty-first century have revolved around the concepts of student learning, assessment, and strategic planning. These dialogues continue to call for major change and the effect is causing student affairs researchers and practitioners to modify practice. Several scholars associated with the fields of higher education and student affairs have outlined the need for (a) student affairs-specific assessment (Banta, 2002; Huba & Freed, 2000; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005a; Miller & Malandra, 2006; Schuh, & Upcraft, 2001; Suskie, 2004, 2009; Upcraft, 2003; Walvoord, 2004), (b) strategic planning (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2009; Hollowell, Middaugh, & Sibolski, 2006; Hossler, Kuh, & Olsen, 2001); (c) student learning Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2005b; Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2005; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators [NASPA] & American College Personnel Association [ACPA], 2004; Priddy & Keiser, 2007) and (d) clear linkages among them to support an increasingly intentional, evidence-based student affairs field with legitimized functions.

A criticism of student affairs is that it is not cyclical in (a) assessing what/how students learn as a result of student affairs activity, (b) using assessment to produce evidence of how students learn, or (c) using those assessment success results to conduct divisional strategic planning to increase the occurrences of student learning. "Although student affairs organizations are not at the center of controversy over accountability in higher education, criticism of the profession is growing" (Blimling, 1999, p. 51). Terenzini and Upcraft (1996) noted, "while assessing the purported outcomes of our efforts with students is probably the most important assessment we do, it is seldom done, rarely done well, and when it is done, the results are seldom used effectively" (p. 217). As budget cuts and reductions in resources continue to threaten higher

education, student affairs will not only need to assess the effectiveness of its activity (Banta, Black, & Kline, 2001; Doyle, 2004; Green, Jones, & Aloi, 2008; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996), but also the impact that activity has on student learning. Once that impact is measured, practitioners will need to strategically plan for increased student learning based on what they have assessed.

The lack of intentional, cyclical alignment among assessment, strategic planning, and student learning within student affairs practice limits the ability of student affairs practitioners to purposefully modify practices that result in more student-learning opportunities. "Key to the concept of student learning outcomes, as to formal assessment practice, is the principle of intentionality" (Keeling, Wall, Underhile, & Dungy, 2008, p. 14). This dearth of intentional cyclical alignment in practice suggests that there is little significant literature to guide practitioners. It further suggests that practitioners may lack the interest, time, or skill to locate and interpret scholarly work to enhance their practices.

The current study addressed how divisions implement field-specific documents and commonly accumulated data to assess, strategically plan, and give rise to significant student-learning opportunities.

Background of the Problem

In early days of college and university life students indicated that they expect quality. In 1811, South Carolina College students outsmarted the steward who had brought an old bull for slaughter when they drove the bull into the river and drowned it. "But most students, while quite able to anticipate the wormy salt pork or the breakfast slum made of yesterday's boiled beef and potatoes now hashed and fried, were unable to do very much about it" (Rudolph, 1990, p. 101). In turn, early student personnel had expectations of the students they served. An eighteenth-

century theologian, when conversing about student activities, "argued that if young men had an itch to do something, they should plant a garden" (p. 151).

The accountability of student affairs is beyond furnishing meals and physical activity. The whole-student experience, in and outside of the class undertakings, are what postsecondary institutions have come to consider when designing a quality college experience (Kuh, 1996, 2001). There is no exclusive experience. Quality of the student experience has precedence, particularly for student affairs. Adherence to methods of accountability can prevent inappropriate and ineffective practice, promote student learning, and further legitimize the field. Student affairs personnel without accountability could find themselves lost in hollow activity, as well as negating statements such as the one made by philosopher, historian, and writer on education, Jacques Barzun:

> We have to strip higher education down to the basics--students, teachers, and blackboards. Cut out all of these counseling programs, opportunities for acting, student periodicals and guest lecturers. These things are in themselves valuable, but if we can't afford them, they are the things that should go, together with the personnel that operate them. (Honan, 1998, p. 44)

In a legalistic higher education era the cost of postsecondary education continues to rise. Litigation expenses resultant of ill-effective practice have become an add-on to operating expenses. Students, parents, and legislatures are continuously demanding that higher education, more specifically student affairs, prove the profession's influence is necessary on college campuses (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a). Justification of practice is not new to the field of student affairs. Early and contemporary scholars have routinely noted in their own words "student affairs is under considerable pressure to demonstrate its importance and worth" (Upcraft, 2003, p. 558).

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Student affairs continues to hear the same mantra decade to decade, yet there is little known about how the field is constructing a united front to address major skepticism of its work. The field continues to operate at U.S. colleges and universities, many times, without intentionality.

As institutional resources are consumed by student affairs, little evidence exists to prove that students are learning from the activity that student affairs generates. Angelo (1999) noted "over the past two decades, we've made impressive progress in assessment. On the other hand, we still don't have much solid evidence of learning improvement" (p. 1). Student affairs has responded to this problem with conversations about the field's purpose and the launching of major reform efforts that generated activity to demonstrate evidence of student learning as a result of student affairs practice (American Association for Higher Education [AAHE], 1992; ACE, 1983; ACPA, 1996; NASPA, 1987; NASPA & ACPA, 1997, 2004; Whitt & Miller, 1999; The Wingspread Group, 1993).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which student affairs assessment data are utilized in strategic planning of student learning at six land-grant, *CampusLabs* institutions. Land-grants were chosen given their unique niche and culture within higher education. The presupposition examined posited that if the mission of student affairs is based on student-learning outcomes, then all strategic operations within student affairs divisions need to be data driven and pursued only if foreseen to further student learning. Findings will determine the extent that student affairs assessment data indicative of student learning are utilized in the strategic planning process within student affairs divisions. Assessment results illustrate what we know about student learning; by using those results to inform strategic planning, practitioners can create further student learning opportunities.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided this study:

1. How are divisional assessment processes linked to student learning?

2. How are divisional strategic plan(s) linked to student learning?

3. How do student affairs divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment?

4. Who is involved in divisions' assessment and/or strategic planning, and what are the major responsibilities of these individuals?

5. What are common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning?

Significance of the Study

Connecting strategic planning, assessment, and student learning from an institution-wide or external-to-higher education perspective, addressing the three in silos, and exploring the influence of external standards on student affairs program assessment have been explored. The present study is unique because it specifically addresses the cyclic process of assessment (of student learning), strategic planning of student learning (utilizing assessment data), and student learning (Figure 1) from a field-specific standpoint.
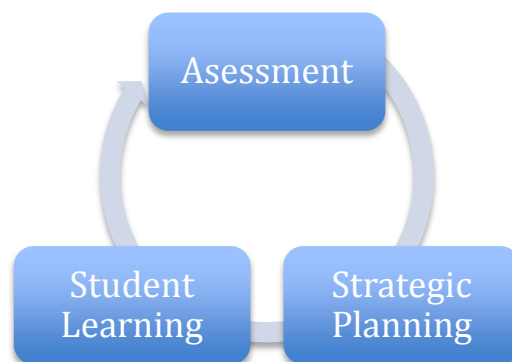
Figure 1. Cyclic process of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning.

The intent of this research project is to determine the common practices of *CampusLabs*-affiliate student affairs divisions in integrating assessment and strategic planning with student learning. Institutions chosen for this project demonstrated dynamic student learning activity as a result of student affairs departmental work; had vigorous strategic planning and assessment processes (that includes knowledge incorporation of what is proven to enhance student learning), and demonstrated success in linking the three. Because

> the most effective means of learning about best practice is to contact campus
>
> representatives from those institutions that are most frequently cited as models or [are]
>
> making highly effective planning decisions grounded in information that has been
>
> systemically gathered to support institutional policy. (Middaugh, 2010, p. 44)

This research will contribute new scholarly and student-affairs practitioner friendly knowledge to the field. The research is expected to have value for practitioners because information was gathered by interviewing student affairs personnel; interviewing other administrators involved in student affairs strategic planning and assessment processes; as well as reviewing documents, such as student affairs-related strategic plans, assessment plans, annual and accreditation reports, internal communications, press releases, and related professional development resources created by professionals in student affairs divisions at institutions in the study. Since institutions are varied in the approach to successfully connect student learning, assessment, and strategic planning, this study's analysis of data resulted in a synthesis of common practices. The results will be shared with institutional planners and other interested individuals as a model for student affairs divisions to adopt or consider in developing or modifying their own processes.

Definition of Terms

       The following operational definitions are presented to ensure a consistent understanding of terms used throughout the study. All definitions are accompanied by their citations.

       Accreditation: "The values-based, trust-based, judgment-based, standards-based, evidence-based, voluntary, nongovernmental process by which institutional quality, assurance and improvement is determined" (Eaton, 2008). Also "a process by which an institution of postsecondary education evaluates its educational activities, in whole or in part, and seeks an independent judgment to confirm that it substantially achieves its objectives and is generally equal in quality to comparable institutions or specialized units" (Young, Chambers, Kells, & Associates, 1983, p. 21).

       Assessment: "The process which measures whether something was done as intended" (Stammen, 2007). "A means for focusing our collective attention… - examining assumptions and creating a shared academic culture dedicated to continuously improving the quality of higher education learning. Assessment requires making expectations and standards for quality explicit and public-Systemically gathering evidence on how well performance matches those expectations and standards…Analyzing and interpreting evidence, and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance… " (Angelo, 1995). Assessment is either formative (during data gathering) or summative (after data has already been collected) (Brown, 1979; Suskie, 2004).

       CampusLabs (formerly StudentVoice): A for-profit organization marketed to student affairs. The organization provides creation and enhancement tools to accomplish a variety of tasks associated with assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. (StudentVoice, 2011, p. 1)

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Conceptual Framework: Explained as an instrument that "explains, either graphically or in narrative form, the main things to be studied-the key factors, concepts, or variables-and the presumed relationships among them" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 18). "Often expressed as a visual model by other authors for a relationship – predicted to hold true" (Creswell, 2005, p. 127).

Evaluation: "is the process which determines how well something was done… the act of rendering judgments to determine a program's or project's value, worth, or merit" (Stammen, 2007) and "is any effort to use assessment evidence to improve…departmental, divisional, or institutional effectiveness" (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 19).

Effectiveness: "The extent to which institutions meet their stated mission, goals, and objectives" (Dugan & Hernon, 2002, p. 376) and "an internal process of planning and evaluation that is intended to ensure that the college's performance matches its purpose" (Cistone & Bashford, 2002, p. 17). The Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC/CIHE) suggests that "effectiveness processes inform planning, decision making, and resource allocation" (Cistone & Bashford, 2002, p. 17). According to Welsh and Metcalf (2003a), effectiveness is "activities such as student learning outcomes assessment, academic program review, strategic planning, performance scorecards, performance benchmarking, and quality management" (p. 184). According to Upcraft, "Effectiveness includes not only assessing student learning outcomes, but also assessing other important indicators, such as cost-effectiveness, clientele satisfaction, clientele needs, professional standards, benchmarking, policies and practices, and outcomes such as student learning, academic achievement, and persistence" (2005, p. 470).

Learning: "a complex, holistic, multicentric activity that occurs throughout and across the college experience" (NASPA & ACPA, 2004, p. 1).

Measurement: "the methods used to gather information for the purposes of assessment. Typically divided roughly into two categories: quantitative and qualitative" (Komives & Woodard, 2003, p. 555).

Mission Statement: A mission "clarifies an organization's purpose, or why it should be doing what it does" (Bryson, 2004, p. 127).

Skype: A peer-to-peer voice over Internet protocol (VoIP) that allows registered users to communicate via instant messaging, voice chat, and video conferencing (Skype, 2011, p. 1).

Stakeholder: "any person, group, or organization that can place a claim on an organization's attention, resources, or output, or is affected by that output" (Bryson, 2004, p. 48). Examples of stakeholders include students, faculty, alumni, donors, etc. (Sevier, 2000, p. 158).

Strategic Planning: "a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it" (Bryson, 1995, pp. 4-5); "examines the big issues of an organization: it's mission, purpose, long-range goals, relationship to its environment, share of the market, interactions with other organizations" (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001, p. 10; Upcraft, 1996, p. 14); or "provides the basic directions and rationale for determining where an a organization should head and provides the specifications against which any organization may best decide what to do and how to do it. It is a process for creating and describing a better future in measurable terms and the selection of the best means to achieve the results desired" (Kaufman, Oakley-Browne, Watkins, & Leigh, 2003, p. 42).

Student Affairs: A profession that seeks ways to facilitate student learning in a variety of contexts; works to prepare students for civic, career, and leadership roles; and also works to understand how students develop and learn (Komives & Woodard, 2003).

Student Learning Assessment: "Systemic collection of information about student learning, using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available, in order to inform decisions about how to improve student learning" (Walvoord, 2004, p. 2).

Student Learning Outcomes: "Define the goals of learning experiences; they specify what a student should be able to know, do, or value after participating in those activities" (Keeling, Wall, Underhile, & Dungy, 2008, p. 13).

Vision Statement: "A vision clarifies what the organization should look like and how it should behave as it fulfills its mission" (Bryson, 2004, p. 127).

Limitations

Several limitations of the current study merit attention. This study collected data using *Skype*. In some cases, participants turned off the video feature so that their image could not be seen during the interview. This limited facial cues that could have been drawn upon. This study was limited to data from institutions where the experiences of the employees are not the same. This limitation exists because configurations of student affairs divisions differ from one institution to another. Data was collected mainly during the Fall and Spring semesters/quarters, rather than the summer, possibly reducing the respondent sample size.

During the course of the study, Higher Learning Commission replaced accrediting methods. PEAQ was replaced with two new Pathways referred to as the Standard Pathway and the Open Pathway. This limitation had bearing on questions related to student affairs assessment. The change also had bearing on campus environment.

Variability among commonly used terms and definitions used in the literature of student affairs arose as a limitation. Terms are not used independently of related terms (Upcraft, 2003) throughout the literature. Examples include key terms discussed heavily in this study. "Assessment and accreditation are terms that often are used interchangeably" (Wehlburg, 2008, p. 11). "The terms assessment and evaluation are often used interchangeably. . . Some higher education officials think of these terms synonymously, while others believe there is a difference between the two terms" (Knight, 2003, p. 10).

An example of this difference of professional opinion can be found in a document published by the American College Personnel Administrators (1996) wherein scholars acknowledged "the terms learning, student development, and personal development are used interchangeably throughout this document" (p. 1). To minimize this limitation, the researcher did not provide operational definitions in the interview protocol. There are a variety of allowable definitions and a multiplicity of ways that a respective institution uses these related terms. This particular limitation receives special attention in the literature review.

The sample consisted of those who responded to the researcher's invitation to participate. All respondent data for this study involved self-reported answers from participants.

Delimitations of the Study

The following delimitations were present as the study: (a) gathered information only from student affairs professionals and professionals directly involved in the process, (b) surveyed individuals who work for accredited, land-grant institutions affiliated with the company *CampusLabs* and, (c) excluded respondents who work as professionals in related fields such as online universities or colleges. The experience of professionals at other types of institutions such

as small, private, or other types may be different from those of student affairs professionals at accredited, land-grant institutions or at institutions that affiliate with *CampusLabs*.

Assumptions

The researcher assumed the following philosophical stances: (a) the mission of a student affairs division should be based on student learning; (b) all strategic decisions within the division should be made in accordance with what has been proven to enhance student learning; (c) a deliberate, cyclical process, including assessment, strategic planning, and student learning, prevents silo work and is a high-quality practice toward improving student-learning opportunities; and (d) student affairs divisions implement or revisit a form of assessment and/or strategic planning for each area in the division on at least a periodic or annual basis. The study further assumes that respondents answered the interview protocol questions with accuracy.

Organization of the Study

Chapters subsequent to this section provide further information to address the problem of the study. Chapter Two outlines relevant literature that contextually narrows the problem and provides a basis for the guiding instruments: the Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions (Appendix A.) and the Interview Protocol (Appendix B.). Following a discussion of student affairs accountability to provide a framework, four areas - as shown in student affairs literature of practice and research - are reviewed: (a) assessment, (b) strategic planning, (c) student learning in student affairs, and (d) linkages among them. The chapter concludes with a summary of literature relating to intentional connection of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning in student affairs as well as the resultant challenges to practice.

Chapter Three includes an explanation and rationale for the research and design, description of population, sample, respondents, demographic data, data collection and analysis

description and pretest procedures and pilot study results. Chapter Four includes case-specific

summaries, the response rate, demographics, and description of findings presented by case

institution. Chapter Five also includes data analyses and results from the document content

analysis protocol and the interview protocol developed from the literature review and conceptual

framework in accordance with the identified constructs. Chapter Six presents summary,

conclusion, and recommendations through data-emergent themes and implications for student

affairs practitioners and researchers.

CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Five key areas formed the basis of this study and gave focus to the literature review: (a) accountability; (b) student affairs assessment; (c) student affairs strategic planning; (d) student learning in student affairs; and (e) linkages: connectivity of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. To date, there is a dearth of literature that explains the aforementioned in relation to each other. This chapter provides a summary of literature of research and literature of practice. The chapter begins with an overview of accountability, its history in student affairs, legacy, benefits, reactions to accountability and the role of accreditation. Second, the literature of research and literature of practice is examined to address assessment in student affairs, its history and framework, and relationships. Third, the literature salient to strategic planning in student affairs, its history, framework and relationships is summarized. Finally, the chapter addresses the links between student affairs assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. The understanding framed by this chapter gave rise to a preliminary conceptual framework that was used to guide the remainder of the study. The preliminary conceptual framework is addressed in the conclusion of the literature review.

Research Questions

Current literature does not cyclically link all three areas, but commonly addresses assessment, strategic planning and student learning in silos or dyads (Blimling, 2005; Hamrick, Evans, & Schuh, 2002), often portrayed as non-inclusive of the other. This study contributed to the existing knowledge in the field by exploring the convergent and divergent aspects of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning in student affairs. Keeling et al. (2008) noted that silos have overwhelmed horizontal elements in that

Most institutions do not naturally, intuitively or intentionally address the continuum of

student learning across the institution and through time of enrollment…this has profound

implications for the assessment of student learning. To understand the impact of higher

education, institutions must do a comprehensive, horizontal assessment. . . to create (or

measure) that impact, institutions must crosslink vertical programs in meaningful ways that

create a continuum of learning. (p. 7)

The study's purpose was to determine the utilization of student affairs assessment data in

strategic planning of student learning at six land-grant, *CampusLabs* institutions. Research

questions were as follows:

1. How are divisional assessment processes linked to student learning?

2. How are divisional strategic plan(s) linked to student learning?

3. How do student affairs divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment?

4. Who is involved in divisions' assessment and/or strategic planning, and what are the
   major responsibilities of these individuals?

5. What are common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic
   planning, and student learning?

This chapter examines student affairs specific literature that comprehensively focused on

the roles of student affairs practitioners and the process they may employ relating to assessment,

strategic planning, student learning, and their linkages. The chapter also introduces literature-

based theoretical constructs and propositions that were developed into the conceptual framework

for this study.

Scholars (Maxwell, 2005, Merriam, 2009) noted that the hypotheses and or research

questions might change after the researcher has initiated the study. The literature review section

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did not include a complete literature review until after the data had been collected. The initial literature review was preliminary. Instruments mentioned in the literature review were built from information within the literature review. These instruments correspond to each research question, the Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions (Appendix A.), the Interview Protocol (Appendix B.), and the Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.).

Accountability

The review is predicated on accountability. The literature identifies accountability as a major factor for assessment and strategic planning in higher education (Lingenfelter, 2005; Miller & Malandra, 2006; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003b). Limited empirical research exists to address how student-learning focused practitioners involved in student affairs assessment and strategic planning, divisionally synchronize opportunities to intentionally create student learning, therefore, how they contribute as accountable partners in the academy.

History of Accountability in Student Affairs

The need for student affairs-specific accountability has been documented over many decades. Awareness of accountability within the profession is apparent via the consumption of commercially developed instruments, books, fads (movements), databases, and official statements. This documentation from government, business, industry, and professional organizations are routinely leveraged to organize or provide evidence of student learning, promulgate standards, and legitimize student affairs work. Student affairs literature has been plagued with "the sense of urgency about stimulating and developing the management, organizational skills, and knowledge necessary to deal with accelerating paradigm shifts [that] has triggered a profusion of management gurus, fads, books, and new methods" (Kaufman et al., 2003, p. 11).

Products are in place but precedence, consumption, and application are varied, voluntary and dependent upon the decision of leadership. Huba and Freed (2000) stated that, "administrators who set the tone for the institution and implement policies play a critical role in creating the type of culture of evidence that will allow assessment to flourish" (p. 85). Table 1 lists examples of nationally known resources that are, or have been utilized to bind student learning to the work resultant of student affairs activity.

Higher education and student affairs enterprises have espoused a variety of models "visible in wave after wave of imported business techniques such as MBO [Management by Objectives], PPBS [Planning Programming Budgeting System], zero-based budgeting, strategic planning, …institutional effectiveness" (Ewell, 1989, p. 9) and TQM [Total Quality Management]. Few in the monolithic display have "demonstrated a true embracing of a culture of assessment" (Wehlburg, 2008, p. 8).

> Institutions of higher education are always under pressure to become more efficient and effective. In response, many have attempted (either voluntarily or under mandate) to adopt new management systems and processes that were originally designed to meet the needs of (presumably) more efficient business or governmental organizations.
> (Birnbaum, 2000b, p. 1)

Schuh (2009) reported that, "practitioners were seeking ideas about how to conduct assessment projects. They had moved beyond the 'convincing' stage in their thinking about assessment and needed practical advice about how to conduct assessments" (p. xii). Schuh's statement highlighted that practitioners see an obvious need to traverse accountability. Table 2 identifies some commonly utilized statements and databases used by practitioners in effort to be accountable.

Table 1

Snapshot of Standardized Instruments, Books, and Movements Used by Student Affairs to Provide Evidence of Student Learning

Standardized Instruments	Books	Movements
a. The National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) b. UCLA Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) Freshman Survey c. Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), d. The Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), e. The Measure of Academic Proficiency and Progress (MAPP) f. Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) g. Decision Trees	a. NASPA & American College Personnel Association. (2004). *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience*. b. *Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* c. *Assessment Reconsidered.* Keeling, et al. (2008) d. *Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs*	a. Accreditation movements of the late 19th century - focused on minimal standards (Wehlburg, 2008, p. 6) b. Information-Gathering about student learning – mid-twentieth century (Ewell, 2002b; Ewell, 2002c; Astin, 1977; Pascarella and Terenzini, 1991; Tinto, 1975). c. Strategic Planning 1972-1994 (Birnbaum, 2000) d. Total Quality Management/ Continuous Quality Improvement:1985-1996 (Birnbaum, 2000a, p. 92) e. Managerial Grid f. Brainstorming g. MBO [Management by Objectives h. PPBS [Planning Programming Budgeting System] i. Zero-based budgeting j. MBWA [Management by Walking Around] k. The Learning Organization l. Transformational Leadership m. Servant Leadership o. Systems Thinking

Table 2

Snapshot of Professional Statements and Databases Used by Student Affairs to Provide Evidence of Student Learning

Government/Business/Industry/Professional Organizations Statements	Government/Business/Industry/Professional Organizations Databases
a. *Knocking at the College Door.* Publication provided by the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, that offers "detailed projections of high school graduates by state, income, and rate/ethnicity that can help identify demographic changes that influence future college populations" (Schuh, 2009, p. 27). b. National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). "Provides an annual digest that offers information regarding national and state trends" (Schuh, 2009, p. 25) c. The Integrated postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) "a federal database provided by the National Center for Education Statistics…IPEDS allows, among other things, institutions to gather comprehensive data for benchmarking against other institutions (Schuh, 2009, p. 13) d. U. S. Department of Education (2006). *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of US Higher Education.*	• TracDat(Nuventive) • Tk20, Inc. • TaskStream • StudentVoice (*CampusLabs*) • LiveText https • iWebfolio(Nuventive) • Foliotek • Epsilen • eLumen • Eduventures • EduMetry • Blackboard • TrueOutcomes • WEAVEonline • The Advisory Board Company

Espousing an off-the-shelf set of criteria for quality in assessment too quickly devolves

into support for assessment practice that is mechanistic, and even mindless; "one size fits

all" assessment plans fall apart when applied in different institutional contexts and fail to

enhance the work of educators and assessment professionals. (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 37)

"Off-the-shelf" products offered within professional conference exhibit halls, and volumes of

scholarly contributions to student affairs literature illustrate that the field has historical

knowledge and benchmark practices. Table 3 summarizes themed documents frequently cited

regarding accountability in student affairs. How is it that practitioners still struggle with

organizing actions to assess how and what students learn as a result of student affairs activity?

> Most of student affairs' influence on educational outcomes is inferential and indirect.
> Unless student affairs educators can show how their programs, activities, and services
> relate directly to student outcomes such as technical competency, communication, critical
> thinking, ability to function in a global community, and adaptability, the profession's role
> in higher education will be diminished. (Blimling, 1999, p. 54)

The former U. S. Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, appointed the Spellings

Commission, which comprised leaders from higher education, government, policy, business, and

industry. The commission's report made recommendations about the state of higher education

and addressed reform efforts for the following areas: accountability, cost, access, financial aid,

learning, and innovation. Among the major recommendations made for higher education was the

development of an accessible database that could be used to "obtain comparative information

including cost, price, admissions data, college completion rates and, eventually, learning

outcomes" (U. S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 21). Reform had again entered the agendas

of postsecondary professionals.

The Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA) was a major reformation enacted as a

result of the Spellings Report. The American Association of State Colleges and Universities

(AASCU) and The National Association of State Universities and Land-Grand Colleges

(NASULGC) created VSA. VSA furnishes "a consistent set of prescribed data elements to meet

external demands for greater institutional accountability and transparency" (Middaugh, 2010,

p. 16). Participating VSA institutions are provided access to *The College Portrait*, which

furnishes basic comparable information through a common web report. "Information includes student and campus characteristics, cost of attendance, success and progress rates, campus safety, class size, student experiences on campus, and student learning outcomes" (Voluntary System of Accountability, 2013). VSA collects information about student learning outcomes and is intended to meet external demands for institutional accountability and transparency. VSA data has little evidence describing how student affairs professionals improve student learning.

Table 3

Frequently Cited Accountability-Themed Documents Utilized in Student Affairs Dialogue

Document	(SSPV) Student Personnel Point of View	Return to Academy	(SLI) Student Learning Imperative	Good Practice	Powerful Partnerships	LR & LR2
Decade	1930s	1970s	1990s	1990s	1990s	2000s
Role of Student Affairs Staff	Instructional	Behavioral scientists & academicians	Student Affairs Practitioner as Educator	Student Affairs Practitioner as Educator	Students as Educational Partners	Students as Equal Partners
Learning Focus	Holistic ("whole student")	Shift from extracurricular to academics	Seamless Learning Environment	Active student learning	Holistic ("whole student")	Transformational learning
Learning Content	Personal development	Development to education	Learning and development intertwined	Learning and development intertwined	Learning and development intertwined	Whole student learning Importance of out-of-classroom learning
Other themes		Assessment measures for accountability		Systematic inquiry	Accountable for learning	Identifying and achieving learning outcomes
						Connecting Strategic Planning, Assessment, & Student Learning

Note: Adapted from "How Students Make Meaning of their Intentional Out-of-class Educational Experiences," by K. L. Isett, 2011. Copyright 2011 by Arizona State University.

Legacy

Accountability is clearly a popular term in student affairs. Student affairs is a helping profession wherein practitioners nurture values (such as the value of accountability) in the people they educate and assist. The value of "humanistic orientation" (Sandeen & Barr, 2006, p. 4), or care of the "whole student," solidified professional altruism to accountability early in the field's pioneering era. The 1937 and 1949 statements that were commissioned, published, and approved by the American Council on Education (ACE) acknowledged the profession's spirit of accountability by stating:

> One of the basic purposes of higher education is the preservation, transmission, and enrichment of the important elements of culture: the product of scholarship, research, creative imagination, and human experience. It is the task of colleges and universities to vitalize this and other educational purposes as to assist the student in developing to the limits of his [or her] potentialities and in making his [or her] contribution to the betterment of society. This philosophy imposes upon educational institutions the obligation to consider the student as a whole. . . It puts emphasis in brief, upon the development of the student as a person. . . (1937, p. 1)

The 1949 document stated:

> The college or university which accepts these broad responsibilities for aiding in the optimum development of the individual in his [or her] relations to society will need to evaluate carefully and periodically its curricular offerings, its method of instruction, and all other resources for assisting the individual to reach his [or her] personal goals. Among its important resources, it also will need to provide and strengthen the type of services. . .encompassed within the field of student personnel work. (1949, p. 2)

In addition to the value of accountability found within early statements and within the profession's history, there are two other distinct concepts that these passages outline: (a) the profession's commitment to the development of the whole person and (b) that the profession exists to support the academic mission of the institution (Sandeen & Barr, 2006). These themes are central to the identity of the field. In order for the promulgation of the field's founding paradigms to endure, cyclical linkages among assessment, student learning, and strategic planning must draw a broader maxim.

> Without a systematic approach to gathering information and using that information to determine the effectiveness of student affairs units, initiatives, programs, and procedures, unit leaders will have difficulty determining whether organizational goals are being met, thus making their organizations vulnerable to reorganization, outsourcing, or even elimination. (Schuh, 2009, p. 9)

Benefit

Accountability of higher education (of which student affairs is apart) gives rise to social and economic benefits (Baum & Ma, 2007). Benefits include, but are not limited to, the following: graduates of higher education are more likely to vote and value civic engagement; are more likely to have disposable income and increased capacity for consumption; and are more likely to assist with their children's educational process, therefore having children who are better prepared for schooling. Overall society and graduates benefit from the funding of government via income tax revenue gained from higher-salaried jobs and experience decreased reliance on government funding. Accountability contributes to the longevity of healthy societies (Baum & Ma, 2007). In addition to the benefits to commerce and community social engagement,

accountability supports institutional reputations and contributes to mutual standards from within the industries of higher education and government.

Institutions are regionally and nationally important to local, state, and federal commerce (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators & American College Personnel Association, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). Students who attend schools based on their needs and/or the reputation of the institution bring student loan dollars and other types of federal and state funds to the schools they choose to attend. According to Baum & Ma (2007), "state and local governments appropriate billions of dollars each year for public colleges and universities and the federal government provides grants, loans, and work assistance, as well as tax credits and deductions, to help students finance postsecondary education" (p. 6). Institutions, and the communities in which they are housed, can find themselves in economic and social danger with lack of accountability and quality control. Economic benefits are directly tied to accountability as concluded in a report by the U.S. Department of Education (2006).

> Higher education institutions should improve institutional cost management through the development of new performance benchmarks designed to measure and improve productivity and efficiency. Also, better measures of costs, beyond those designed for accounting purposes, and should be provided to enable consumers and policymakers to see institutional results in the areas of academic quality, productivity and efficiency. (p. 8)

Reactionary Accountability

Social expectations of who had access to college were revolutionized after World War II. Postsecondary institutions radically transformed the United States through soaring student enrollment, increased diversity, gender issues, and social issues of the day (Sandeen & Barr,

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2006; Birnbaum, 2000a). The 1944 – Serviceman's Readjustment Act (GI Bill of Rights) rewarded veterans for service in the U.S. military by paying college costs and "would go on to have a profound impact on American higher education. Total college enrollment in 1950 exceeded enrollment levels in 1940 by 1.1 million students, or 78 percent" (Birnbaum, 2000a, p. 8). Students of color were not yet welcomed at many higher education institutions in the 1940s and 1950s. Only after the Civil Rights movement would the GI Bill assist record numbers of men and women of color to enter higher education. Due to the GI Bill, "that influx of new students would require colleges to institute new services and build new facilities, and it would lead to a significant expansion in the number of institutions nationwide" (p. 8).

Colleges and universities experienced exponential fiscal growth as underwritten by U. S. dollars through the GI Bill: "new community colleges were founded on a weekly basis, four-year colleges were expanding into university work, and university facilities were inadequate to cope with the demand for graduate education" (Birnbaum, 2000a, p. 21). Few benchmarks of effective practice were available during this time to student affairs practitioners.

In 1960 higher education was not yet a legitimate field of scholarly inquiry. Aside from a handful of distinguished sociologists, economists, and political scientists, only a few people studied or wrote about higher education, and relatively few journals existed to publish work in the field [of higher education and student affairs]. (Birnbaum, 2000a, p. 30)

"During the 1950s and 1960s subsidies from the federal government and increased expenditures on higher education by the states enlarged still further the public sector" (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997, p. 433). The large dollar amounts allocated to higher education caused several entities to take a closer look at the processes of higher education institutions (Woodard, Love, &

Komives, 2000a). Universities were becoming increasingly controlled by federal and state

agencies, accrediting bodies, professional associations, alumni, parents, family members,

legislators, unions, and corporate and philanthropic sponsors (Middaugh, 2010, Sandeen & Barr,

2006; Peterson & Vaughan, 2002; Wehlburg, 2008; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a, 2003b). Without

much guidance, student affairs worked, "mainly in response to external pressures," and efforts

were only done in response to "the public's demand for accountability" (Sandeen & Barr, 2006,

p. 134). The consequence of this era was reactionary student learning assessment activity.

What to assess also resulted in contention. Choosing the appropriate types of data to

inform practice became challenging. "Simple surveys that provided quick feedback about student

satisfaction with a particular program (for example, orientation) often were the norm, and more

substantive, longitudinal studies of what students were learning in college were not often

pursued" (Birnbaum, 2000a, p. 134).

Guiding the results of professional activities toward providing evidence of student

learning was logical and a way that student affairs could provide evidence that it was in demand.

In the pursuit to find and create such evidence, there was waste of talent and time (Woodard,

Love, & Komives, 2000b). Birnbaum (2000a) quoted one worker as saying, "without really

understanding the decision process, or knowing what information was required, we therefore

began to collect and store massive amounts of data because the technology became available and

it seemed like a reasonable approach" (p. 25).

Student affairs today is similar to the post World War II atmosphere (Wehlburg, 2008).

The reactionary professional behavior of student affairs personnel is much the same in the

present day but the demand for accountability has increased. Many of the same patterns are

recurring as well (Woodard et al., 2000b). The 2009 United States recession has increased

student enrollment and consumption of postsecondary education (Biemiller, 2009; Supiano,

2009); society remains extremely litigious, and as was the case for early practitioners

> The demand for increased accountability for student learning is an invitation for student
> affairs to demonstrate its contributions. Although many performance-based assessments
> are devoid of measures of student affairs' efforts to advance student learning, the
> opportunity exists to expand these measures of assessment. (Blimling, 1999, p. 54)

Student affairs professionals are also similar to their predecessors in that they now collect

massive amounts of data because the technology is available (Wehlburg, 2008). "There are many

hundreds of postsecondary-related surveys and data collections. A much smaller number of these

are accepted as de facto standards that may be relied upon for quality data" (Milam, 2003,

p. 124). Part and parcel of higher education institutions collecting IPEDS (Institutional

Postsecondary Educational Data System) data is that student affairs is also pushed to justify its

existence to external stakeholders in an extremely unsteady economy, "an intrusive regulatory

environment, a litigious society, [and] a society with expansive expectations for higher

education" (Brinkman, 2000, p. 13).

More than 30 years after the booming business of the post World War II era, student

affairs is addressing the same themes (Schuh & Associates, 2011).

> Colleges and universities increasingly are being asked to demonstrate how they make a
> difference in the lives of students, how they contribute to the economic development of
> their communities and states, and how they contribute to the national welfare. Although
> some institutions may have the luxury of ignoring this increasing pressure perhaps due to
> an extraordinary endowment or a unique niche in American higher education, the fact is
> that in contemporary higher education, the vast majority of institutions cannot afford to

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ignore the multidimensional contemporary press for accountability. (Schuh & Associates, 2011, p. 2)

Colleges and universities continue to come under increasing pressure from their constituencies to demonstrate their effectiveness in measurable terms (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996; Woodard et al., 2000b), and the student affairs profession is grappling with invitations to participate on a comprehensive basis. Love and Love (1995) articulated:

…higher education has struggled for a long time with the increasing fragmentation of the learning process, of disciplines and knowledge, of the administrative structure, and of community. Strong cultural forces have acted as barriers to efforts at reforming and transforming higher education... but now forces within and out of higher education have gathered that are exerting tremendous pressure on the entire enterprise...The need for reform is clear. (p. iii)

One year after Love and Love, Schroeder (1996) informed higher education and student affairs practitioners that "higher education is in the throes of a major transformation" (p. 1). That major transformation included "accountability demands" throughout major aspects of the academy (p. 1). A reactive approach was again adopted by student affairs and this cautious era was informed by the highly litigious administrative era of the 1980s, and the result of higher education engaging in "big business" with "government and industry" (Sandeen, Albright, Barr, Golseth, Kuh, Lyons, & Rhatigan, 1987, p. 9).

The report of the Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (1997) held importance because of the representation of land-grant institutions in each U.S. state. The strength of the document came from the contribution of each state's land-grant institution to the discussion of accountability in higher education. The authors of the report

were able to bring attention to a national dialogue on issues of cost, quality, and accountability. This national report was also born from the legalistic era of the 1980s higher education environment that was a "fiscal nightmare for higher education" (Woodard et al., 2000b, p. 6). Thus many land-grant institutions (and thereafter other types of institutions), and entities that fund them became adaptive and responsive to discussions that had, one decade prior, found them outside of court halls and within case law (Woodard et al., 2000a).

> The call for greater transparency and accountability in higher education with respect to student learning and institutional effectiveness is not a fad. The pressure to demonstrate in real and concrete ways that students are learning, and that institutional resources are effectively and efficiently marshaled in support of teaching and learning, is at the heart of future governmental and popular support for higher education. (Middaugh, 2007, p. 27)

Role of Accreditation

According to Eaton (2008), federal funds are only awarded to accredited institutions as dictated by the Higher Education Authorization Act of 1965. Postsecondary institutions are categorized in several ways in the United States. Institutions can be proprietary, non-profit, 2- or 4-year, private or public, accredited, and non-accredited. Carnegie classifications are a classification system that categorizes accredited institutions and groups institutions by a variety of factors that include, but are not limited to, size, setting, and research dollars. Regional and national accrediting bodies can organize types of institutions differently than the Carnegie classification system.

Eaton further stated that regional and national accrediting bodies in the United States are organized under the oversight of the federal government. The U. S. government commissions two national organizations to coordinate accreditation. These organizations are the United States

Department of Education (USDE) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA).

These two main organizations divide into seven national associations and regional organizations.

Six regional (Higher Learning Commission, 2008) accrediting bodies exist in the United States.

An example of one of those regional organizations is the Higher Learning Commission (HLC).

HLC accredits higher education institutions in "Arkansas, Arizona, Colorado, Iowa, Illinois,

Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, Oklahoma,

New Mexico, South Dakota, Wisconsin, West Virginia, Wyoming" (HLC, 2008, p. 1). USDE

and CHEA organize the accrediting activity of regional, faith-related, private career and

specialized institutions recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA),

the U. S. Department of Education (USDE), or both (HLC, 2008). There is also additional

specialized accreditation for majors such as Business or Nursing within institutions of higher

education. In order for a whole institution to be deemed accredited, institutions must apply to

regional and national accrediting bodies and the institution must be accredited as a whole.

Institutions must follow the process and stages set forth by the accrediting body in order

to begin and matriculate through the accreditation process. Housed within the HLC are two

processes (Higher Learning Commission − Institutional Accreditation, An Overview, 2003, p. 1).

HLC "provides two programs for maintaining accredited status: the Program to Evaluate and

Advance Quality (PEAQ) and the Academic Quality Improvement Program (AQIP)" (Higher

Learning Commission − Institutional Accreditation, An Overview, 2003, p. 4). September 2012

the Higher Learning Commission began transition to replace PEAQ with two new Pathways

referred to as the Standard Pathway and the Open Pathway.

The accrediting process of the United States espouses data usage for strategy planning.

Such data usage is confirmed through a site visit to align the institution toward compliance. In

the case of HLC, the compliance process takes 7 years. As can be seen in an overview document via the HLC main webpage, the Criteria for Accreditation are organized under five major headings (Mission, Ethical and Responsible Conduct, Teaching and Learning: Quality, Resources, and Support, Teaching and Learning: Evaluation and Improvement, Resources, Planning, and Institutional Effectiveness). Each Criterion has three elements: Criterion Statement, Core Components, and Examples of Evidence. Criteria Statements define attributes of an organization becoming accredited by the Commission. Organizations must also addresses each Core Competency by providing evidence of meeting a Criterion. The Examples of Evidence highlight types of evidence used in addressing a Core Componency. (Higher Learning Commission – Policy Title: Criteria for Accreditation, 2014, p. 1)

In the late 20th century a great deal of attention was focused on the use of assessment data for accountability (Wehlburg, 2008). Eaton (2008) observed that the enterprise of higher education has since been characterized by self-regulated environment and activity independent of the consistent, direct supervision of others. Student affairs is subject to significant federal regulations and mandates that implicate them as partners in the supply and demand of information to the government that provides billions of dollars to higher education each year. Much of the information supplied from student affairs is utilized in its day-to-day operations. Data are collected, provided to funders, but rarely used internally to support student learning.

Postsecondary institutions created this foremost method of self-regulation in the United States over 100 years ago (Brubacher & Rudy, 1997; Schuh, 2009). This self-regulation method is the decentralized accreditation system that is a private enterprise with regional, some faith-related, and programmatic accrediting power for areas such as business and medicine (Eaton, 2008). Accreditation and student affairs both reproduce values-based work that is underpinned

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by similar concepts: (a) the profession is committed to the development of the whole person (or, in the case of accreditation, student learning) and (b) the profession (or institution) exists to support the academic mission of the institution. Similarities between student affairs and the accreditation enterprise continue in that accreditation and the student affairs field work to establish practice upon standards, evidence, student learning, judgment, and a level of trust. Each also has deep compliance relationships with the U. S. government (NASPA & ACPA, 2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999).

During the 1980s, the U. S. Department of Education, which had little operational control of the decentralized, peer-reviewed accreditation agencies, began requiring accreditation agencies to provide evidence of student learning (Palomba & Banta, 1999). In this era of reform movements at the national, state, and local levels, publications and reports (National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983; National Institute of Education, 1984) garnered wide-reaching attention and gave impetus to William Bennett, Secretary of Education. In 1988, Bennett "issued an executive order requiring all federally approved accrediting organizations to include in their criteria for accreditation evidence of institutional outcomes" (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 2). This was the beginning of a new student-learning movement that pushed institutions, student affairs professionals, and higher education in general to focus all effort on student learning. Bennett's declaration encouraged accrediting bodies, hence the post-secondary institutions that receive approval from them, to make "shifts in emphasis from input-based accreditation, to accreditation focused on student learning" (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 302).

Standards had been in place prior to Bennett's decree, but those standards were seen as indirect and unrelated to student learning. "Each of the six regional accrediting bodies in the United States has its own discrete set of standards against which it evaluates member institutions

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for accrediting purposes" (Middaugh, 2010, p. 10). Accrediting bodies are interested in how each of those member institutions demonstrate an "internally driven core process of inquiry to improve student learning" (Maki, 2004, p. 13). While U. S. accrediting bodies encouraged strategic planning and assessment to foster evidence of student learning, accreditation expectations of student affairs personnel were not explicit among statements of accrediting agencies reviewed for this study. However, in the most recent HLC Criterion, although student affairs is not specifically named, references to student support services are named. In examining external standards as they related to student affairs, Cubarrubia (2009) found

> As a major lever for increasing institutional accountability, accrediting agencies should ensure that their standards address the critical work functions of student affairs functional areas more explicitly. Accreditation standards are inconsistent and vague as to how student affairs assessment activities relate to the evaluation of institutional effectiveness. As such, a more explicit line of sight between student affairs and accreditation must be established. Accreditation standards should be reevaluated and, as necessary, rewritten to include specific requirements for student affairs functional areas. (p. 202)

Vague accrediting standards for student affairs, variation of terminology, uneven application of visiting accreditation teams and between accrediting regions, the imprecise role of student affairs in the accrediting process, and varied standards for interpretation, renders student affairs ill equipped to assist the institution in responding to the demands of accrediting bodies (Cubarrubia, 2009). The American Council of Trustees and Alumni (2007) found

> Parents, students, and citizens may assume that accreditation ensures good educational quality, but quality is not what the process measures. Accreditation only shows that the school is following with what the accreditors think is the *proper formula* for a successful

educational institution, not whether an institution is in fact successful at teaching

students. (p. 6)

It is true that each U. S. accrediting agency maintains its own standards. Each agency

contributes to the national conversation about the role of student-learning outcomes. When

accreditors visit campuses and review documents or artifacts submitted as evidence, they are

evaluating the "student learning produced by the institution in the context of the institution's own

mission, its stated learning objectives, and its identified means of assessing student learning"

(Beno, 2004, p. 66). Accreditors study the institution's formula of successful student learning.

Student Affairs Related Assessment

Student affairs-specific assessment literature is rich with case study research of

assessment practice and information for improving assessment. Knight and Yorke (2003) argued

that they largely represent a 'cottage industry' lacking a systematic theoretical basis for

understanding judgments of achievement, and thus "attempts to enhance assessment practices are

built on sand" (p. 209). Student affairs-specific literature is insulated because most authors

neglect to link systemic connections of assessment to strategic planning and/or student learning

(Keeling, 2006). Strategies for planning and implementing student assessment efforts are

available to student affairs professionals (American Association for Higher Education [AAHE],

1992; Ewell, 1988a, 1988b; Rossman & El-Khawas, 1987; Peterson, Augustine, Einarson, &

Vaughan, 1999), but the literature is devoid of examples of cyclical connection and relationships

that would result in student learning (Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996; Ewell, 1988b).

Green, Jones, and Aloi (2008) found that "very limited research has been conducted in the area

of assessment within student affairs" (p. 135). They also found that alongside anecdotal evidence

and among research conducted, instruments unconnected to the institutional or divisional mission

were created at the unit-level to count student numbers and gauge satisfaction, and plan future programming (Green, Jones, & Aloi, 2008). Omitting the conversation of connection (or lack thereof) conceals the field's imperfection (Kuh et al., 2005a). Authors who insulate student affairs and higher education from this type of critique deny practitioners the chance to better engage students and improve learning opportunities (Ewell, 1991; Ewell, 2002b).

Among select practitioner-focused works reviewed (Middaugh, 2009; Schuh & Associates, 2011; Wehlburg, 2008), it was clear that there is also a paucity of literature that addresses assessment as both a divergent and convergent area that stands apart from and links to other divisional processes such as strategic planning and student learning. In some cases (Kuh, Kinzie et al., 2005a; Love & Estanek, 2004; NASPA & ACPA, 2004; Schuh & Associates, 2011) it is noted that this connection should occur but the literature fails to guide the reader to an actual or conceptual model of connecting the processes. When examples are cited only two of the three key areas are discussed as important for purposeful connection (Ewell, 1999; Lovett, 2006; Schmidtlein, 2001). According to Middaugh (2009);

> As an avid consumer of literature on effective planning, I can attest to the fact that there is no shortage of writings that describe how institutions can best organize for planning activity, that offer a plethora of conceptual frameworks for both long-range and strategic planning, and that assure institutions that they will have the optimal structure in place for planning into perpetuity. What these writings lack – and what I would argue most professional development activities related to the teaching of planning also lack – is a feedback loop that informs institutions how effective those plans are in moving them forward. (p. 5)

The idiom "closing the feedback loop" of an assessment cycle refers to the "process of using results from appropriate and meaningful student-learning outcomes to make modifications in teaching and learning activities" (Wehlburg, 2008, p. 5) or "studying assessment findings to see what improvements might be suggested and taking the appropriate steps to make them" (Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009, p. 22). The next section on student affairs assessment will discuss divergent and convergent roles of assessment in systemic connection to strategic planning and student learning processes.

History of Student Affairs Assessment

The First National Conference on Assessment in Higher Education held in the fall in Columbia, South Carolina in1985 is considered to be one of the first markers of the assessment movement in higher education. The conference was co-sponsored by the National Institute of Education (NIE) and the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE). The main agenda focused on a report published the previous year (Ewell, 2002a, p. 7). The report's recommendations had implications for student learning, as it addressed how "colleges and universities could 'learn' from feedback on their own performance" (Ewell, 2002b, p. 15), and "research tools that had become available to practitioners" (p. 15).

The literature triggered by this conference was marked by three distinct patterns that are apparent today in assessment's literature of practice and literature of research. They are as follows: "(a) concept and language development of assessment, (b) "tools and techniques" of assessment, and (c) case studies of assessment in relation to organizational structure and faculty involvement" (Ewell, p. 12, 2002b). These three patterns appear throughout the literature today and will periodically be addressed below. Other relevant patterns that influence student affairs assessment practice today are

the challenges of expansion in the 1950s and 60s, enrollment and financial constraints in

the 1970s, and new educational demands in the 1980s [that] have shifted the managerial

focus of performance by higher education institutions from resource adequacy, to

efficiency, to effectiveness, to broader concerns for academic and institutional quality.

(Peterson et al., 1999, p. 4)

Each of these eras has affected higher education and, in turn, has informed current

student affairs assessment practice. Assessment as a movement was distinct in the 1980s as

critical reports were produced and became popular in education. The first report to spark reform

was the aforementioned report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*

(National Commission of Excellence in Education, 1983). The authors of the report stated "the

average graduate of our schools and colleges today is not as well-educated as the average

graduate of 25 or 35 years ago, when a much smaller proportion of our population completed

high school and college. The negative impact of this cannot be overstated" (p. 12-13). Numerous

other reports thereafter (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher

Education (1984); Bennett, & National Endowment for the Humanities (1984), and; Project on

Redefining the Meaning and Purpose of Baccalaureate Degrees (1985)) called for improvements

in public education. Colleges, in particular, were asked to standardize their approach to student

learning and were characterized in those reports as unfaithful to their missions during the 1960s

social unrest and 1970s atmosphere of financial hardship (Ewell, 1991).

Publishing and dissemination of reform reports and subsequent action on behalf of

professionals and professional organizations are not unique to the landscape of student affairs

and higher education. Table 4 offers a historical snapshot of student affairs-specific reform

reports.

Table 4

Student Affairs-Specific Reform Reports (adapted from Taylor's (2008) Reports on Reform in Student Affairs)

Report	Author (Year)
A Perspective on Student Affairs	NASPA (1987)
Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs Reasonable Expectations: Renewing the Educational Compact Between Institutions and Students	ACPA & NASPA (1997) Kuh, Lyons, Miller, & Trow (1994)
The Student Learning Imperative	ACPA (1994)
CAS Standards	Council for the Advancement of Standards (1988)
Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning	American Association of Higher Education, ACPA, NASPA (1998)
Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education	National Institute of Education (1984)
Campus Life: In Search of Community	Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching (1990)
Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Education	Chickering and Garrison (1987)
Report of the Wingspread Group on Higher Education	Wingspread Group (1993)
Reinventing Undergraduate Education: A Blueprint for America's Research Universities	National Association of State and Land-Grant Colleges (1997)
Leadership Reconsidered: Engaging in Higher Education in Social Change	Astin & Astin (2000)
Returning to Our Roots: The Student Experience	Boyer Commission (1998)

Note: Adapted from "Student affairs divisions as learning organizations: Toward a conceptual framework for organizational improvement," by M. Taylor's, 2008. Copyright 2008 by University of Pittsburgh.

Framework of Student Affairs Assessment

Student affairs literature asserted that all divisional activity, including assessment, as supportive of student learning (ACPA & NASPA, 2010; Ellis, 2010). This mantra has not always been true for student affairs. Over the field's development, student affairs has developed conversational frameworks as a way to address practitioner activity. The 1980s national reports called for higher education's improvement and thus formed two contextual paradigms on which assessment is still debated. First is "assessment identified as a systematic process for continuous improvement where programs were responsible for what they evaluated and the decisions that resulted" (Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2012, p. 10). Second is assessment as "the push for public accountability, with the stated aim of enabling comparison of assessment results of institutions" (p. 10). Simply put, one paradigm reflects internal accountability and the other external.

It is important to note that there are various types of assessment models applicable to student affairs (Banta, 2002; Bresciani et al., 2009; Maki, 2004; Schuh & Upcraft, 2001; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). The most-documented, comprehensive assessment model in student affairs literature was developed by Upcraft & Schuh (1996) (revised in Schuh & Upcraft, 2001) and outlines eight components. Keeling et al. (2008), Schuh and Upcraft (2001), among other scholars have delineated several types of assessment that can result in knowledge about how or what students learn. A description of each major type as outlined by Schuh and Upcraft (2001) are presented in Table 5.

Each of the aforementioned types of assessment attempts to measure whether something was done as intended on behalf of the student or client and involves intricate details that include

human and other institutional resources. One example of a needs assessment is a three-phase

needs assessment that entails a detailed process.

Table 5

Major Types of Assessment

Type	Description
Tracking	"keeping track of who uses student services, programs, and facilities" (p. 13). Tracking asks the question "who is using our services, programs, and facilities?" Without this knowledge the assessment intention will be null.
Needs assessment	"assessing student and other clientele needs" (p. 13). Needs assessment addresses what types of services, programs, and facilities are needed. This determination is made on several factors that include, but are not limited to institutional and divisional expectations, research on student needs, a method to understand what students want verses what is needed.
Satisfaction assessment	assesses "student and other clientele satisfaction" (p. 13).
Culture & Environment	"Student cultures and campus environments assesses" (p. 13).
Outcomes assessment	"Outcomes assessment simply assesses outcomes" (p. 13).
Cross or peer institutional assessment	Cross or peer institutional assessment, which compares an institution with other institutions similar to it" (p. 14).
National standards assessment	"National standards assessment is using national standards or benchmarks to compare performance to national standards" (p. 15).
Cost-effectiveness assessment	"cost-effectiveness assessment examines the benefits to students based on the worth of cost to attend or the quality of the experience" (p.15).

(Schuh & Upcraft, 2001, pp. 13-15)

"A [needs assessment is a] systematic set of procedures undertaken for the purpose of

setting priorities and making decisions about program or organizational improvement and

allocation of resources. The priorities are based on identified needs" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, p. 4). The system includes three phases: pre-assessment, assessment, and post-assessment. The purpose of the pre-assessment stage is

> to investigate what is already known about the needs of the target group; to determine the
>
> focus and scope of the assessment; and to gain commitment for all stages of the
>
> assessment, including the use of the findings from program planning and implementation.
>
> The pre-assessment also provides the basis for determining the most appropriate kinds of
>
> data-gathering methods for the assessment. (p. 20)

Witkin and Altschuld (1995) posited that at this stage, the following factors can be considered:

- Who will be on the needs assessment committee

- What do we need to look for, what is already known?

- Gain buy-in from people so they may feel ownership and help disseminate information

- Check political climate

- Develop evaluation plan

- Gain access to needed data

- Develop management plan

Phase two of a needs assessment is the assessment. At this stage the primary goal is to specify the target group(s) and the boundaries of the assessment as clearly as possible. This provides a more precise focus and scope for data gathering and analysis, which were at least partially determined during Phase 1. During phase two the following can be considered:

- Solidifying context – for whom is the needs assessment being done?

- Environmental scanning

- Trends: current state of the problem

- Barriers: economic/social/political

- Defining constructs

- Understanding needs and priorities

- Gathering data from each level; level 1: customers, students, those for whom the institution exists, level 2: service providers, level 3: organization-wide issues from administrators (space, staff, funding, student info, systems)

- Data analysis

- Report findings within scope (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995)

Phase three, post-assessment, is the stage where recommendations become operational into what, who, and how to deliver recommendations of the assessment. In this phase a needs "assessment can fail due to implementation failure, a high turn-over rate of committee members, little or no fiscal support, and poor pre-assessment work" (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995, pp. 76-89). Nuance exists in needs assessment. Further nuances exist within the context of needs assessments. Table 6 shows some examples of the types of needs assessments that can be performed divisionally.

A practitioner must first understand and acknowledge what type of assessment is appropriate in accordance with her or his specific needs and capabilities prior to implementing assessment. Maki (2004) synthesizes assessment into two types, formative and summative. The formative type of assessment is "designed to capture students' progress toward institution- or program-level outcomes" (p. 4), while summative is "designed to capture students' achievement at the end of their program of study" (Maki, 2004, p. 6). It must also be determined at which level assessment should occur (Huba & Freed, 2000). Whether working within the framework of

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Table 6

Types of Needs Assessments

Methods for Conducting a Needs Assessment	Future-Oriented Needs Assessment Procedures
Nominal Group Technique	Strategic Planning
DACUM (Developing a Curriculum)	Cross-Impact Analysis
Critical Incident Technique	Future Wheel
DELPHI (Technique that relies on experts for consensus)	Trend Analysis
Focus Group	
Behavior Frequency Counts	
Stimulus Response Tables	
Behavior Algorithm/Frequency Counts	
Survey/Interviews	
Causal Methods (Fishboning, Fault Tree Analysis, Cause and Consequence Analysis)	

Note: Adapted from "Planning and conducting needs assessment: A practical guide," by B. R. Witkin, J. W. Altschuld, 1995) Copyright 1995 by Sage.

reactionary assessment for justification (Peterson & Vaughan, 2002; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a, 2003b; Woodard, Hyman, von Destinon & Jamison, 1991), proactive assessment toward improvement (Ewell, 2002b), assessment for external accountability, or assessment to improve student affairs practice and student learning (Cerbin, 2009), the assessment should be encased within institutional and divisional understanding and skill (Huba & Freed, 2000).

Planning tasks. "New forms of assessment should focus on establishing what college and university graduates have learned-the knowledge and skill levels they have achieved and their potential for further independent learning" (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p. 18). There are foundational qualities of any assessment process. Most assessment projects will include (a) specifying the purposes, goals, and audiences; (b) designing methods and measures; (c) carrying out the data collection and analysis; (d) communicating the findings to the audience;

and (e) obtaining feedback, follow-up, redesign, and improvement suggestions (Bauer &

Hanson, 2001; Bresciani et al., 2009).

A synthesis of literature on the student affairs assessment process (Bauer, 2003; Bresciani

et al., 2009; Huba & Freed, 2000; Maki, 2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Schuh & Upcraft, 2001;

Upcraft & Schuh, 1996) revealed frameworks that parallel each other, and indicated that the

assessment process includes key steps:

1. Define the problem

2. Identify purpose or agree on goals and objectives

3. Decide instrumentation

4. Link assessment to other educational efforts

5. Data collection methods/develop planning document

6. Determine who is responsible for data collection

7. How will data be analyzed

8. Outline implications for practice

9. Effectively report results

10. Reexamine results

This synthesized model takes precedence because "what is needed is a much more

systemic approach as suggested by Schuh and Upcraft (2001)…"a step-by-step process that

increases the likelihood that the assessment study will be done logically and thoroughly,

producing viable results" (Komives & Woodard, 2003, p. 562). What the synthesized model

lacks is the "how-to process" toward making appropriate linkages.

Consistency of process is a characteristic of student affairs assessment as is method

multiplicity (Kuh, Gonyea, Rodriguez, & Banta, 2002). Current best practice in assessing

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student-learning outcomes suggests that "multiple measures should be employed in determining the extent to which students have made cognitive gains over their college experience" (Middaugh, 2009, p. 6). Of the seven pillars Shulman (2007) classified that situate assessment for accountability two of the principles focused on the concept of multiple measures.

> 3. Design multiple measures. As the stakes associated with a measurement rise, the restrictions on its form rise concomitantly— thus the need to move from judgment to measurement and from interpretation to objectivity…It is dangerous to permit highly consequential decisions of policy and practice to rest on the results of a single instrument, however carefully it has been field-tested and ostensibly validated…
>
> 4. Work on combining multiple measures. (p. 2)

Middaugh (2007) maintained, "accrediting agencies in particular are requiring that institutions furnish multiple measures that clearly and objectively demonstrate cognitive gains during the time spent in postsecondary education" (p. 26).

Banta (2002) acknowledged the need to "recognize that university-wide assessment must accommodate multiple systems of thought" (p. 272). She continued "we must use multiple measures and look for confirming evidence among the collective findings as we seek guidance for our improvement efforts" (p. 272). This means, use a variety of direct and indirect approaches to understand how students learn. Examples of approaches include focus groups, surveys or other data gathering methods. "No single strategy is sufficient, in and of itself, in describing student learning. Assessment of learning outcomes requires the use of multiple measures to provide adequate evidence of student cognitive gains" (Middaugh, 2010, p. 97).

Relationship to mission. Assessment of student learning should be central to the mission of student affairs divisions and the institutions that house them (Aloi, 2004; Sandeen & Barr,

2006). Scholars have noted that student affairs must first understand the institutional mission and its relationship to student affairs work prior to determining student learning outcomes (Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Huba & Freed, 2000; Palomba & Banta, 1999). Such understanding within the division will allow the connection of learning outcomes to directly relate to the institutional and divisional missions. This understanding is also important to distinguish because typical unit-level responsibilities in student affairs may differ from one campus to the next. Working in context of a respective institutional mission insures that student affairs supports the academic mission of the institution.

Results stemming from the assessment of student learning can determine the quality of divisional strategic planning (Maki, 2002). "Connecting assessment to institution-wide strategic planning is a way to increase the perceived value of assessment" (Banta, Jones & Black, 2009, p. 4). Strategic planning that is completed from assessment results can increase student learning, which is vital to the mission of student affairs divisions (Bresciani et al., 2009). "In the planning process the need to demonstrate accountability for student learning may become a mechanism for ensuring that student learning outcomes, and their assessment, are included in the institutional plan" (Banta, 2009, p. 4).

Student affairs mission statements are typically written to complement other missions such as the institutional and academic missions. The profession exists to support the academic mission of the institution (Sandeen et al., 1987; Sandeen & Barr, 2006) and this theme is central to the identity of the field.

> Mission statements often contain the language of program or institutional objectives, providing an overall description of what an institution and its programs intend students to learn. Learning outcome statements, learning objectives, or educational objectives

identify what students should be able to demonstrate or represent or produce as a result of

what and how they have learned at the institution or in a program. That is, they translate

learning into actions, behaviors, and other texts from which observers can draw

inferences about the depth and breadth of student learning. (Maki, 2004, p. 61)

Huba and Freed (2000) contend that institution-wide mission and its goals connect to division-

wide student affairs mission and divisional goals, which connects to division and department

objectives, and finally to student learning outcomes. Figure 2 illustrates how the connection can

be cultivated from top to bottom or from bottom to top while aligning mission, goals, objectives,

and student learning outcomes throughout the institution and the student affairs division. Such

cultivation may occur laterally or between levels.
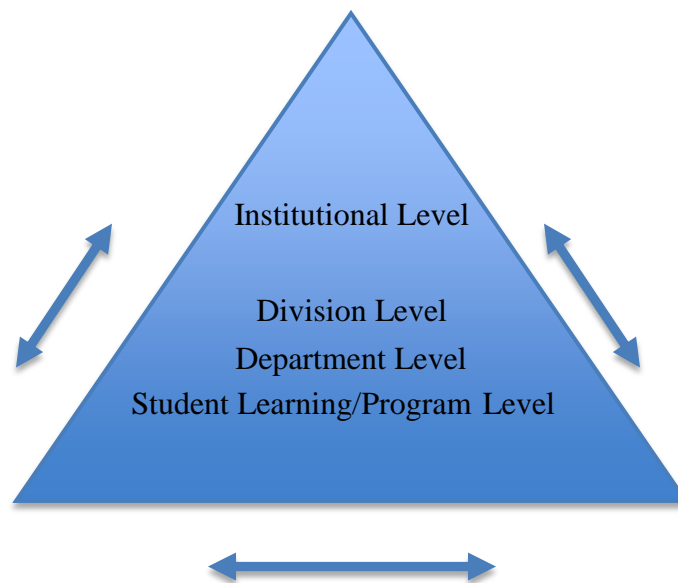
Figure 2. Connection of mission, goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes. (Adapted
from Huba & Freed (2000).

"There are multiple levels of learning outcomes-institutional, divisional, departmental,

programmatic" (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 13). When practitioners at each level strive to learn what

and how students learn they are "directing professional energy and curiosity into what and how

students learn, then, is an essential process in a learning-centered institution" (Maki, 2004, p. 11). This study's operational definition for assessment, "the process which measures whether something was done as intended" (Stammen, 2007), indicated that, if divisions are assessing, then they are measuring if learning has occurred from the activity generated within the division's departments. The intentions of the division, stemming from the division's mission statement, give an indication as to if the intentions were met and what they were.

Relationship to student learning outcomes. Many student affairs professionals may not think of themselves as educators but "one of the primary implications of understanding oneself professionally as an educator is the obligation to assess the learning that happens in one's programs and services" (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 8). The roles student affairs professionals espouse in teaching and learning could result from practitioners seeing themselves as only program planners or through personal experiences with the schooling process. Those roles could also be a type of professionalism borrowed from academic affairs practitioners or from others who work institution-wide.

Student learning from institutional perspective has been widely explored (Baxter-Magolda, 1998, 2003; Entwistle, 2005; Hussey & Smith, 2003; Miller & Ewell, 2005; and Whitt, Pascarella, Elkins Neshiem, Marth, & Pierson, 2003) and has a deeper academic history than literature of co-curricular learning (Baxter-Magolda, 2003; Blimling & Whitt, 1998; Kuh, 2001; NASPA & ACPA, 2004; Whitt, 2006). Scholarship relating to student learning from within the field of student affairs is fairly new.

"Assessment can be a powerful tool in linking goals to outcomes, helping define quality, and determining if quality exists in student affairs…Assessment can help determine if we [student affairs] have been successful" (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001, p. 11). Salient questions facing

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student affairs professionals include how to best gather and use "interactions across the academic and social geography of a campus [to] shape the educational opportunity structure…" (Schuh, 2009, p. 37) and how to best utilize the same information to assist student learning (Schuh, 2009). Student affairs and academic affairs, sometimes unaware of the workings of their respective professions, each offer theory and/or practice to inform the theory and/or practice of the other. Student affairs, once seen as responsible only for discipline and regulated student behaviors outside the classroom, is now being recognized for its ability to nurture students' intellect (Engstrom & Tinto, 2000).

> The increasing complexity of modern American society has resulted in new demands upon our educational system. These new demands, in turn, have generated concern not only with the formal content of the subject matter taught, but also with the extent to which the educational process has an influence upon the attitudes and values of students. (Kuh & Associates, 1991, p. 238)

Kuh & Associates make it clear that students can be nurtured into critical thinking about how their behavioral stances connect to their academic experiences. "To create [seamless] conditions that foster student learning, all institutional agents must know how students learn and be familiar with the out-of-class conditions that encourage students to take advantage of learning and personal development opportunities" (Schroeder, Mable, & Associates, 1994, p. 107). According to Pascarella & Terenzini (1991), many important changes that occur during college are probably the cumulative result of a set of interrelated experiences sustained over an extended period of time. If experiences are to be positively impacted and continuously improved over an extended period, then student and academic affairs should work to make service interactions with students

as uniformly as possible (Kuh 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Schroder, Mable, & Associates, 1994).

Such uniform interactions should be part of a cyclical process that connects assessment and student learning; then assessment and strategic planning; and, finally, strategic planning and student learning (Keeling, Wall, Underhile, & Dungy, 2008). As evidenced in student development theory, students have differing identities in approaching postsecondary education and the way each student will experience higher education cannot be uniform, but approaches to insure learning can be standardized. When the Schroeder (1996) published his work, it was, in part, intended to assist student affairs staff in helping faculty and the larger institution understand the nature of teaching and learning outside the classroom. "Both student learning and student development are the work of student affairs" (Dungy, 2003, p. 355). Student affairs professionals can use the language from ACPA, and similar language from other reports, to develop a common language that could be shared to insure learning. The uniformity fostered by common language could serve to facilitate the connection between assessment and student learning.

Pascarella and Terenzini along with other student affairs scholars/philosophers participated in *The National Study of Student Learning (NSSL)*, a 3-year longitudinal research project under the auspices of the National Center on Postsecondary Teaching Learning and Assessment (NCTLA). Its intention was to expand knowledge about college impact by examining academic and non-academic influences on (a) student learning, (b) student attitudes about learning, (c) student cognitive development, and (d) student persistence (Pascarella et al., 1996).

Among the study's major findings was the interconnected and overlapping influence of students' college experiences as they shape student learning (Pascarella et al., 1996). The

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analyses of the study "point to a wide variety of curricular, instructional, out-of-class, and organizational climate variables that affect how students learn and grow. This finding indicated a need to blur the boundaries between 'academic' and 'student' affairs" (Pascarella et al., p. 191). The literature of practice has helped student affairs scholars to understand that "seamless environments link and align people, experiences, and resources in a mutually supporting, complementary fashion to achieve a variety of important learning outcomes" (Schroeder, 2003, p. 621). According to Terenzini and Upcraft (1996), the hallmarks of student development are the result of interconnected student experiences involving learning experiences throughout college. The NCTLA study also found that students develop in much more holistic and integrated ways than are reflected in institutional organizational structures, attitudes, and behaviors.

Blurring the boundaries includes philosophical principles such as "whole student" and "seamless environment" (Kuh, 1996) on a larger institutional level. These two concepts unite academic and student affairs in recognizing the whole of students as being the root of college and university life. Kuh (1996) created a model for developing this seamless learning environment that integrates both academic and student affairs. The model followed six principles to cultivate successful change: (a) generate enthusiasm for institutional renewal, (b) create a common vision of learning, (c) develop a common language, (d) *foster collaboration and cross-functional dialogue* [emphasis added], (e) examine the influence of student cultures on student learning, and (f) focus on systematic change.

During the early stages of student and academic affairs collaboration, this enthusiasm must be felt and shared by many members of the senior administration, along with the champions they call upon to carry out the change. Keeling et al. (2008) articulated that any assessment

model should include four stages and ten incremental steps in preparation for connection to student learning. Throughout the four stages, the authors encourage identification of an "assessment champion". Kuh (1996) described champions as change agents for the initiative that help provide buy-in for others. "One or more champions must emerge to create a sense of anticipation and to establish the momentum for change" (Kuh, 1996, p. 137). When this enthusiasm is shared, the excitement becomes genuine, and others buy-in. This phase is powerful and often the most challenging because change may evoke painful and even traumatic emotions within people. It is important during this phase to highlight all of the positives, especially the notions of renewal and growth. Timing is essential in generating enthusiasm, and many times, a new incoming senior student affairs officer may be synonymous to the motivation to assess (Kuh, 1996).

To achieve success in creating this common vision of learning, both academic and student affairs must realize that they are on opposite sides of the same student-learning street. Utilizing qualitative case study research, Philpott and Strange (2003) noted that lock-stepping practice can be complex; "although [student affairs and academic affairs] collaborators attempted to make seamless what had previously been disjointed, namely intellectual and social learning, their bonds to different but complementary professional cultures prevented them from achieving this goal outright" (p. 91).

Academic and student affairs professionals are each socialized differently within institutions in how they are encouraged to approach students. Consequently each normalizes versions of professional practice and rhetoric. "If dialogue is stifled, organizational learning is blocked in which case student learning will be negatively affected" (Kuh, 1996, p. 140). The call for partnerships between student affairs professionals and faculty is essential in Kuh's model.

Research indicates many effective outcomes from educational partnerships (Schroeder, 1996). Some of Schroeder's (1996) findings included improved student satisfaction, academic achievement, persistence, higher graduation rates and gains in general educational outcomes. Schroeder showcased how effective partnerships can enhance students' cognitive and psychosocial development as well as foster academic, social integration, and learning.

In summation, student learning is at the heart of student affairs divisions and the institutions that house them. Student learning is the focus of internal (i.e., daily teaching and learning) and external (i.e. accreditation) processes. Sources used to assess student learning in higher education ultimately come from a variety of sources: statistics, in-person interviews, review of dollar allocation, operations, and others. Assessing student learning also comes from students themselves.

Assessment Planning and Major Goals of Assessment

The wave of assessment books, articles, and professional presentations from 1990 to the present day make clear that student affairs recognizes the need to assess (Schuh, 2009). There are several interpretations of assessment and its role. The multiplicity of interpretations leads to questions about subjectivity and questions about the goals and effectiveness of assessment activity within student affairs divisions. The literature of student affairs is plagued with an assortment of accepted definitions and approaches to assessment.

We distinguished between summative assessment and formative assessment to try to clarify why assessment is done. We resorted to assessment cycles to imply that assessment was a continuous process rather than a discrete event. We added prepositional phrases to clarify the purpose when we talked of assessment of student learning and assessment in the service of learning…but the noun, and thence the center of attention, is

assessment, and this word continues to convey misleading meanings and images in spite

of modifying words or phrases. (Wehlburg, 2008, p. 24)

A select, but varied set of definitions of assessment are commonly cited in student affairs

specific literature, dependent on when it was written. In the literature of assessment from

the1990s, Angelo (1995) was frequently cited as having defined assessment as "an ongoing

process aimed at understanding and improving student learning" (p. 7). Angelo further stated that

assessment

involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting appropriate criteria and high

standards for learning quality; *systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting*

evidence to determine how well performance matches those expectations and standards;

and using the resulting information to document, explain, and improve performance.

When it is embedded effectively within our institutional system, assessment can help us

focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared academic

culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher education. (p. 7)

A second clearly commonly held definition of assessment in the 1990s was that of Palomba &

Banta (1999)

"the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs

undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development" (p. 4) …

Assessment is more than the collection of data…educators must be purposeful about the

information they collect…they must clarify their goals and objectives for learning and be

aware of where these goals and objectives are addressed in the curriculum…What should

college graduates know, be able to do, and value? Have the graduates of our institutions

acquired this learning? What, in fact, are the contributions of the institution and its

programs to student growth? How can student learning be improved? (p. 4)

By examining frequently cited definitions from the 2000s, it is clear that writing on student-

affairs specific assessment describe assessment several ways, rendering several assumptions

about the operation and influence of assessment practice within student affairs. According to

Huba and Freed (2000),

> Assessment is the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and
>
> diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know,
>
> understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences;
>
> the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning.
>
> (p. 8)

In 2004 Maki explained the function of assessment differently.

> A systemic and systematic process of examining student work against our standards of
>
> judgment, it enables us to determine the fit between what we expect our students to be
>
> able to demonstrate or represent and what they actually do demonstrate or represent at
>
> points along their educational careers. Beyond its role of ascertaining what students learn
>
> in individual courses, assessment, as a collective institutional process of inquiry,
>
> examines students' learning over time. It explores multiple sources of evidence that
>
> enable us to draw inferences about how students make meaning based on our educational
>
> practices. (p. 2)

The most often cited and most succinct definition by student affairs specific scholars

found was "any effort to gather, analyze and interpret evidence which describes institutional,

divisional or agency effectiveness" (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 18). Others defined assessment as

a constant process, which cyclically improves student learning (AAHE, 1992; Anderson, 2001; Angelo, 1999; Huba & Freed, 2000; Maki, 2002; Marchese, 1987; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Suskie, 2004). Stammen (2007, section 1) stated, "Assessment is the process which measures whether something was done as intended" In juxtaposition to his definition of assessment, Stammen continued by saying

> evaluation is the process which determines how well something was done. Both
> assessment and evaluation are used for documenting progress toward accountability as
> the former documents that a task was accomplished and the latter explains how well that
> task was accomplished. Therefore, an evaluation process is defined as the act of
> rendering judgments to determine a program's or project's value, worth, or merit. It is
> also a check to see whether the program or project meets the reasons for being in
> existence. (section 1)

The multiplicities of ways to define assessment indicate that student affairs practitioners, like the field's scholars, understand assessment differently. Similarly, within groups comprised of both practitioners and scholars, understanding can vary. Varied understandings among professionals have deep and profound implications for the field, and ultimately offer no possibility for a uniform approach to successful student learning experiences. Regardless of interpretation or definition,

> When beginning any assessment process, the problem, need, or issue that serves as the
> foundation of the assessment should be determined (Banta, 2002; Banta & Associates,
> 2004; Bresciani, 2006; Maki, 2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Schuh, Upcraft, &
> Associates, 200I; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). The purpose for the assessment is then derived

from this problem, issue, or need and serves as the foundation of the assessment process.

(Bresciani et al., 2009, p. 17)

Student Learning Assessment or Program Assessment

Student learning assessment or program assessment is not limited to justification and improvement; rather assessment "seeks data that lead to the improvement of all intentional learning experiences" (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 28). Many student affairs programs predicate data collection on program needs assessments, which may or may not assess student learning. Timko (1999) found that two-thirds of student affairs professionals interviewed were "not linking needs assessments to program planning or evaluation efforts" (p. 162). Instead the assessment is limited to program improvement, student satisfaction surveys, or the tally of participating students (Bresciani, 2002b; Bresciani et al., 2004; Green et al., 2008; NASPA & ACPA, 2004).

The task of anecdotal assessment is often accompanied by noting the number of seats and taking notice of how many are filled, physically or electronically counting students as they enter or exit, or circulating satisfaction surveys during or at the end of a program – all of which say nothing about how a student has experienced learning and cannot be used to strategically plan for more learning. These quick methods only inform the practitioner how many chairs to have at the next event and of the hasty notions of event goers. This methodology can be dangerous for student affairs as an enterprise because as "assessment connects to strategic planning, strategic planning overlooks intuition and esteems "hard" data" (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 191).

Unfortunately, many student affairs assessment activities do not progress to this next level. For example, the number of recreational opportunities on campus may be well publicized, but likely to be less available are data describing who uses the facilities and what students gain from participating in recreation programs. Similarly, surveying

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students to assess if they were satisfied with their tutoring may be somewhat helpful, but assessing student performance after tutoring provides data more relevant to the institutional mission. Thus, the emphasis in assessment changes from "How many students participated in the campus-wide event?" to "What did students learn by participating in the campus-wide event?" (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010, p. 12)

In addition to counting chairs or participants, creating learning outcomes and assessing student learning is preferred. Shipman, Aloi, and Jones (2003) contended, "developing statements of intended learning outcomes is an important foundational step in the assessment process" (p. 340). These authors further advocate that this foundational step should render learning outcomes that focus on being credible to the public; relate to the major institutional mission and its values; be aligned with the co-curricular experience, the individual course, academic program, and institutional goals; and be measurable. "Student learning outcomes define the goals of learning experiences; they specify what a student should be able to know, do, or value after participating in those activities. There are multiple levels of learning outcomes-institutional, divisional, departmental, programmatic" (Keeling et al., 2008, p.13).

Empirical research supports the assertion that assessment is frequently implemented in response to external pressure for accountability (Middaugh, 2010; Peterson & Vaughan, 2002; Wehlburg, 2008; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003a, 2003b; Woodard et al., 1991). Assessment was once thought of as vogue but it has become a mainstay. "To improve learning and promote learning communities, we must recognize that successful assessment is not primarily a question of technical skill but rather one of human will" (Angelo, 1999, p. 1). Many people still view the assessment process as a completed process after the accreditation visit is over (Wehlburg, 2007). As Maki (2002) puts it,

Viewed as externally mandated, assessment of student learning typically ebbs and flows

within an institution in relation to the timing of accreditation visits. Originating from an

external force, namely accreditation, assessment is characterized as "burdensome," "a

chore," or "an add-on" to faculty responsibilities, arousing resistance to compliance and

resulting, oftentimes, in a short-lived commitment. (p. 1)

Unfortunately student affairs practitioners can devalue assessment in a data-driven academic

environment because not all practitioners are required to be engaged in assessment. This is no

surprise because the founding paradigm of student affairs is not assessment or data collection but

rather to support the whole of students and the intellectual mission of the institution. Cubarrubia

(2009) found that

. . . student affairs assessment has not been institutionalized in practice. Where

assessment efforts exist, most vary in rigor and quality across different types of

institutions and across different program offices (Astin, 1991; Malaney, 1999; Terenzini,

1989). (p. 12)

Neither does student affairs uniformly adhere to formal standards of student learning assessment.

"Student affairs is a vital partner in the educational enterprise and could solidify its standing by

using accepted assessment processes to provide a real indicator of its quality and effectiveness"

(Anderson, 2001, p. 1).

Bresciani (2002a) found that learning outcomes appear to be difficult for senior student

affairs officers to assess. Bresciani posed that this difficulty "may be because they do not

articulate any student learning outcomes for their programs. And if they do, how do they begin to

provide evidence that their program has contributed to the learning they see or desire to observe"

(p. 107)? As Suskie (2004) explained, "as faculty and staff are introduced to the concept of

assessment, many won't be familiar with the term or will have conflicting ideas about what it means. Having one locally accepted definition helps prevent confusion or disagreement over exactly what is and is not" (p. 56).

In addition to determining how to approach assessment as a team, practitioners may also have difficulty identifying the proper approach. Contemporary literature of practice support a definite difference between assessment and research.

> Assessment stands in clear contrast to research, which is a strategy to prove (or disprove) something. Assessment unlike research, does not set out to test hypotheses, but, instead, strives to know and document what is; the data gathered through assessment activities then inform efforts to change what is. (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 28)

There is student affairs specific literature in conflict with this claim. According to Keeling et al. (2008), "Unlike research, assessment does not need to prove that a certain learning experience alone produced a certain learning outcome – only that students who completed that learning activity had, at the end of it, the desired competency" (p. 35). Manning and Stage (2003) posited that research can be used to facilitate assessment. Maki (2004) provided a representative list of research projects that integrate assessment. Middaugh (2010), stated:

> Although assessment activity certainly has to be grounded in sound research strategies, the primary objective of assessment is to produce information (note again the emphasis on information as opposed to data) that can be used for decision-making and institutional improvement. (p. 174)

Upcraft and Schuh (1996), wrote the following:

> More often than not, to most student affairs practitioners assessment in student affairs means conducting a quantitative study. While we would dispute the notion that

quantitative assessments are the only valid means of conducting true assessments, conducting qualitative assessments are very important…(p. 84)

Schuh and Upcraft (2001) articulated, "a variety of research approaches fit under the umbrella of qualitative assessment research methods" (p. 27).

Upcraft and Schuh (2002) compared and contrasted assessment studies with research studies in order to "explain how these forms of inquiry are different even though they employ similar methodology" (p. 16). In their article, Upcraft and Schuh acknowledged the work of Dary Erwin (as cited in Upcraft & Schuh, 2002), who argued that research and assessment differ by two characteristics:

- Assessment guides good practice, whereas research guides theory and tests concepts.

- Assessment typically has implications for a single institution, whereas research typically has broader implications for higher education. (Upcraft & Schuh, p. 17, 2002)

Upcraft and Schuh, to some extent, agreed:

Assessments use research methods, but they have very different reasons for being conducted. Assessments are undertaken to guide practice. As a consequence of the assessment's findings, practice is adjusted. Research is framed by theory. As a consequence of a study's findings, the theory may be reconceptualized, affirmed, or perhaps even rejected until another investigation is undertaken. (Upcraft & Schuh, pp. 17-18)

Despite how various authors may define the process, several (Banta, 2002; Bresciani, 2009; Maki, 2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999) indicated that the purpose for the assessment stems from a problem or need that would serve as the focus of the assessment process.

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Participants

Discussions in the literature have centered on three major themes regarding whom to include in an assessment effort and what their responsibilities should be. Maki (2004) and Suskie (2009) each identified themes of (a) common understanding among committee members and stakeholders, (b) benefit from a variety of backgrounds and perspectives, and (c) transference of a sense of ownership to committee members. Ewell (1999) concurred with these authors by suggesting that linking assessment to the institutional structure represented on the committee increases the likelihood of institutional usage of the results. "In order to reflect a variety of interests, most institutions identify a committee or task force of faculty, staff, and students that assumes assessment responsibilities" (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 23). Researchers (Maki, 2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Suskie, 2009) identified three campus constituencies as those who are involved in divisions' strategic planning and assessment: student affairs practitioners, faculty, or individuals from the institution's institutional research office. The authors argued that each group contributes to the usability and power of the assessment process, and links the strategic planning and assessment processes by careful inclusion of assessment committee members. "Faculty members and administrators must take responsibility for leading any assessment initiative, but students know how they are experiencing and being affected by a program or the campus in general, and thus can provide valuable perspectives on design…and interpretation of results" (Banta, 2002, p. 264).

Weiner and McMillan (2005) of Southeastern Oklahoma State University published analysis of their campus' experience with HLC standards and the struggle to implement a program that assessed student learning. Their example included ideas for what caliber of participants to include in the assessment process. According to the authors, an initial review did

not uncover much information about "assessment specialists." Weiner and McMillan uncovered the work of other researchers that identified that institutions were moving to establishing assessment coordinators. Researchers contended, "More work is needed to understand the optimal professional characteristics of university assessment coordinators, their duties and responsibilities, and how institutions can support these professionals most effectively" (Lee, Mentkowski, Drout, McGury, Hamilton, & Shapiro (2003, p. 7). Equipped with results of an initial review, Weiner and McMillan (2005) chose to appoint assessment specialists at their institution to execute the following:

> Function as liaisons between individual departments and programs, deans, and the director of assessment.
>
> Assist schools and departments with assessment plans and reports.
>
> Serve in an advisory capacity as a resource and in a consultative role.
>
> Advise the director of assessment and deans on issues of assessment and improving student learning in academic programs.
>
> Meet twice a month with the director of assessment, allowing the specialists to have more detailed view of assessment and a sense of the history of assessment on campus. (p. 7)

In addition to assessment specialists, Weiner and McMillan (2005) reported that they appointed an Institutional Assessment Committee to accomplish the following tasks:

- Develop functions as a policymaking body.

- Review not only academic assessment but also the assessment of academic support, student services, and the library.

- Monitor and review the assessment of entry-level courses, general education, academic programs, student satisfaction, graduate programs, and student life at the university. (p. 8)

The authors articulated that the first accomplishments of this committee were to identify its duties, responsibilities, and functions. It was also the work of the group members to distinguish their work from that of the assessment specialists. A major part of the ongoing work of the group was "to advise, consult, recommend, and guide the schools and departments through the assessment process" (Weiner & McMillan, 2005, p. 8). As mentioned previously, a champion of the effort is needed to gain buy-in (Kuh, 1996). Weiner and McMillan (2005) articulated

> having a senior administrator whose sole function is the responsibility for overseeing the assessment and accreditation efforts of the institution [was necessary]. Each school would designate one specific individual to oversee and serve as a consultant for assessment and accreditation efforts. To emphasize the importance of assessment and accreditation efforts, faculty members in schools who take on this responsibility should receive .25 reassigned time from their teaching load or supplemental pay. (p. 26)

As the plan was adhered to, faculty, staff, and administrators became collaborators in an institutional effort. In 2001, a group made up of the director of assessment and some faculty, separate from the Institutional Assessment Committee, became consultants for assessment and accreditation efforts in academic area at Southeastern Oklahoma State. The institution found that, by systematically including faculty members, rewarding their efforts with institutional commitment to reassign teaching loads or supplement pay, the legacy of assessment continues to permeate the landscape. The professional practice and literature contribution of Weiner and McMillan made very strong cases regarding inclusion of faculty toward the establishment of a

culture of accountability. The literature makes clear that dedication "grows out of a sense of ownership of the project" (Mintzberg, 1994, p. 172). Their contribution also suggests that a sole champion or leader from the administration should oversee the process.

Two years after to the writing of Weiner and McMillan's study was published, ACPA named assessment as the eighth competency area for student affairs professionals. The organizations Steering Committee on Professional Competencies (2007) asserted that "eliminat[ing] the notion that the solution to accountability is simply hiring one student affairs professional to address assessment. Instead, we are now moving toward the expectation that each student affairs professional be able to develop and conduct his/her own assessment in his/her own daily practice" (p. 3). This encouraged unit-level assessment but it simultaneously neglected to enlighten readers on how to develop and conduct assessment across the division and the institution. In 2010, ACPA and NASPA revisited the 2007 document and amended it to include updated professional competency areas; knowledge of conducting assessment remained salient (ACPA & NASPA, 2010).

Measurement Tools

Unit, institutional, and commercially developed measurement tools for student affairs-specific assessment processes are important for practitioners to be knowledgeable about because "student affairs is especially vulnerable to criticism...because it historically has been justified more on an idealistic and humanistic basis than on demonstrated evidence of results" (Doyle, 2004, p. 388). In order to be successful at understanding the student learning landscape as academic partners understand it, practitioners must understand quantitative and qualitative, direct and indirect measurement methods, and be knowledgeable about appropriate application of tools to the chosen method. In relationship to unit and institutional-level instruments, Cubarrubia

(2009) reported that his research finding supported Green, Jones, & Aloi (2008). Cubarrubia concluded that

>most student affairs offices rely on measures and instruments that are developed locally and used for program planning purposes. That is, student affairs functional areas utilize measures and instruments that are specific to their areas and that are not typically connected to the overall mission of the division or the institution.

The Educational Advisory Board (2011), a for-profit company that provides research and advice to higher education on a variety of topics published a research brief that outlined measurement models; campus wide, division or unit level, and decentralized. According to Educational Advisory Board (2011), "Model one is a university-wide process where Academic Affairs and Student Affairs partner to develop broad institutional learning outcomes" (p. 24). This first model is preferred "because it establishes a common framework, enabling results sharing and increased collaboration between Academic Affairs and Student Affairs" (p. 24). Figure 3 is an illustration of is model.
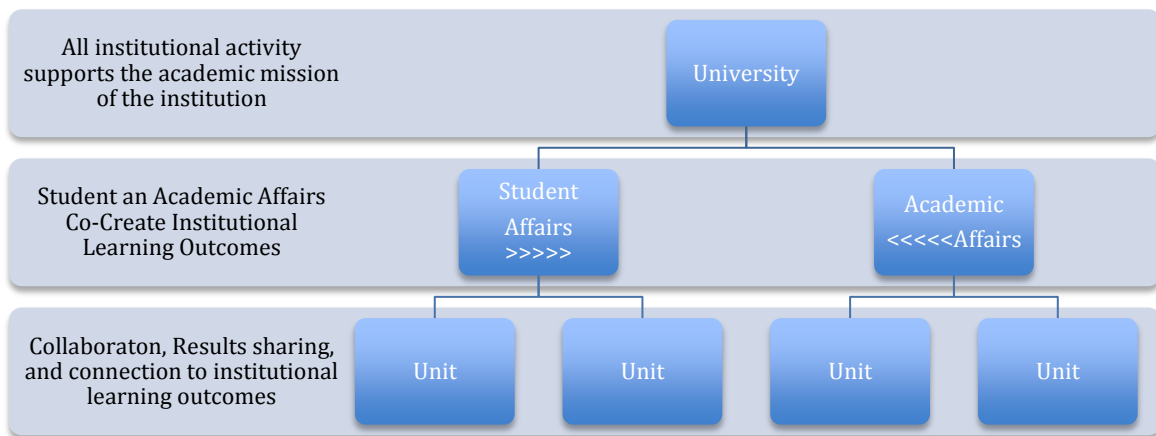
Figure 3. Model One - Methods of Measurement. (adapted, from Educational Advisory Board (2011), *Aligning Co-Curricular Initiatives with Learning Outcomes)*

Model two "focuses on creating learning outcomes at the division level" (Educational Advisory Board, 2011, p. 27). The authors noted that Student Affairs can use this model "to develop divisional learning outcomes that complement Academic Affairs initiatives" (p. 30). Figure 4 is an illustration of this model.
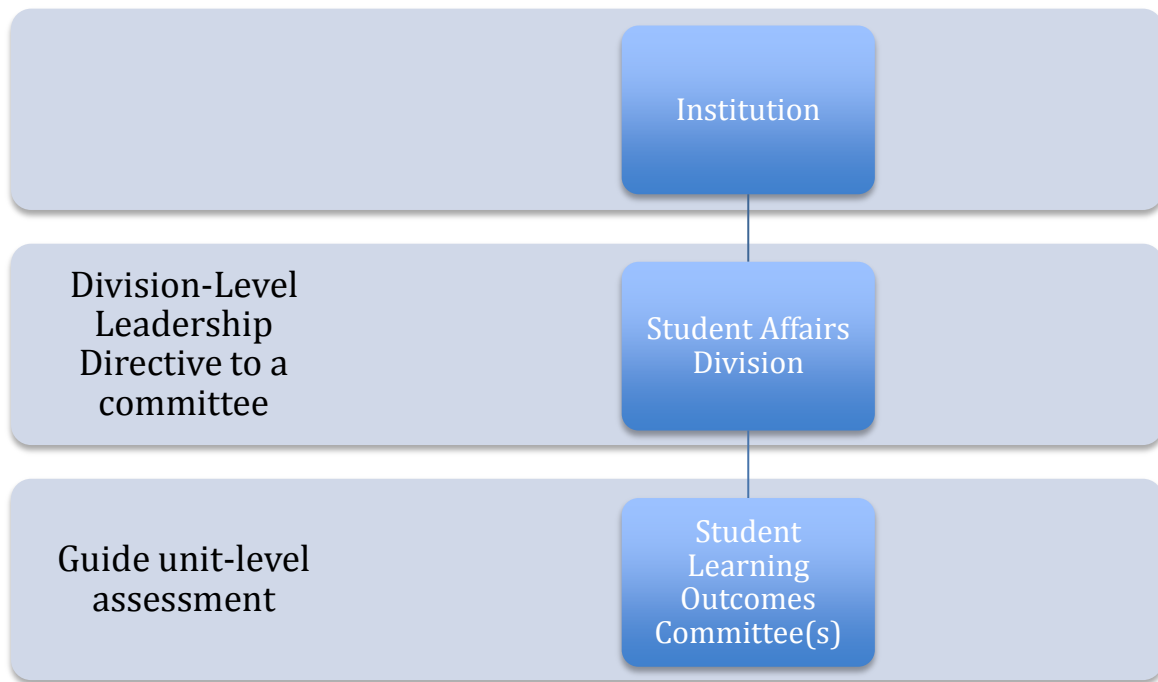
Figure 4. Model Two - Methods of Measurement. (adapted, from Educational Advisory Board (2011), *Aligning Co-Curricular Initiatives with Learning Outcomes)*

The third model "is a decentralized system where individual Student Affairs units articulate their own learning outcomes". While thought of as to empower practitioners and to gain buy-in from them, this method can be problematic because the inherent purpose of student affairs, as found in its founding documents, is to support the academic mission of the institution. A drawback to this model is that often unit-level assessment measurements and outcomes may not connect to the divisional and institutional mission or vision (Educational Advisory Board, 2011).

Conversely unit-level measurement tools have the capability to answer questions that may go unasked on national or widely used commercially developed instruments. Figure 5 is an illustration of is model.
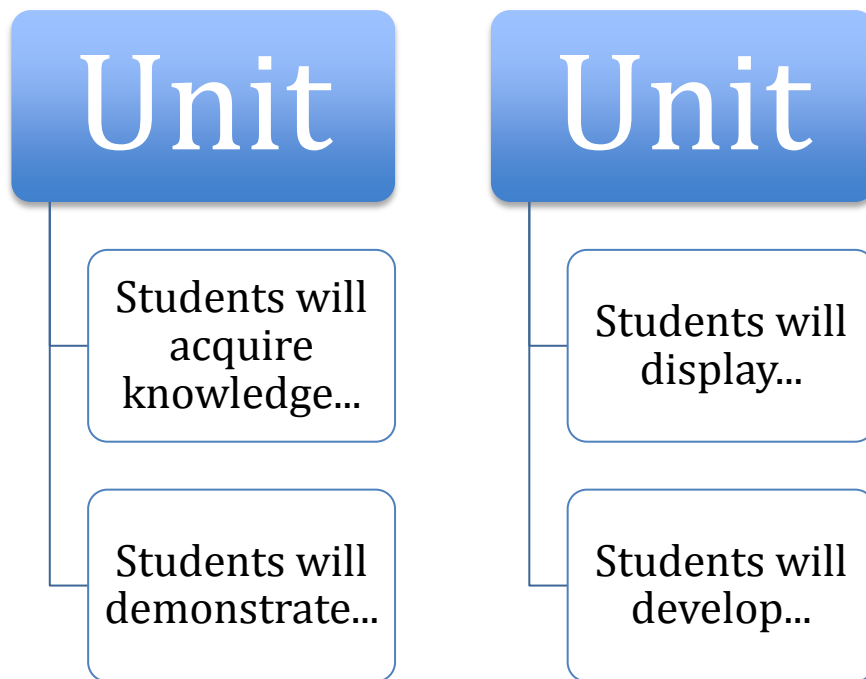
Figure 5. Model Three - Methods of Measurement. (adapted, from Educational Advisory Board (2011), *Aligning Co-Curricular Initiatives with Learning Outcomes)*

National assessment instruments such as the Collegiate Learning Assessment and the Academic Proficiency and Progress also measure information related to student learning (Table 1 and Table 7). Noteworthy is the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) which student affairs-specific authors Sandeen and Barr said is "one of the most encouraging developments in recent years that provides colleges, students, and the public with information regarding students' participation in a number of educational practices demonstrated to be associated with learning" (Schuh, 2009, p. 37). Another example is the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP). This instrument is offered to hundreds of U. S. institutions and administered to freshmen during new student orientation and registration. CIRP results can be "used to provide the campus

community with an annual profile of students at the institution" (Schuh, 2009, p. 37). The below

table illustrates some of the many assessment instrument resources used by student affairs

practitioners to measure and guide divisional assessment work.

Table 7

Assessment Instrument Resources for Student Affairs Practitioners

Resource	Reference & Description
Commission on Assessment for Student Development (ACPA)	http://www.myacpa.org/comm/assessment/#
	*Lists of assessment instruments for student development outcomes
Buros Institute of Mental Measurements	http://buros.unl.edu/buros/jsp/results.jsp
	*Clearinghouse for commercially designed instruments with description of instrument purpose and contents.
North Carolina State University Internet Resources for Higher Education Outcome Assessments	http://www2.acs.ncsu.edu/UPA/assmt/resource.htm
	*Compilation of assessment instruments and site addresses.
FALDO's	Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education. (2006). Frameworks for assessing learning and development outcomes.
	*New resource identifies 16 types of student learning and development outcomes and related commercially designed assessment instruments.
"Review of Selected Assessment Instruments"	Schuh & Upcraft (2001).
	*Annotated resource for assessment instrument specifically geared towards student affairs practice.
National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE)	http://nsse.iub.edu/index.cfm
	*Annually, NSSE obtains information from hundreds of four-year colleges and universities nationwide about student participation in programs and activities that institutions provide for their learning and personal development.
Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP)	http://www.gseis.ucla.edu/heri/cirpoverview.php
	Annually, 700 two-year colleges, four-year colleges and universities administer the Freshman Survey to over 400,000 entering students during orientation or registration.
	The survey covers a wide range of student characteristics: parental income and education, ethnicity, and other demographic items; financial aid; secondary school achievement and activities; educational and career plans; and values, attitudes, beliefs, and self-concept.

Table 7. *Assessment Instrument Resources for Student Affairs Practitioners (continued)*

Resource	Reference & Description
CORE Drug and Alcohol Survey	http://www.med.unc.edu/alcohol/prevention/coresurvey.html * Developed in the late 1980s by the US Department of Education and advisors from several universities and colleges. The survey is used by universities and colleges to determine the extent of substance use and abuse on their campuses
National College Health Assessment (NCHA)	http://www.acha-ncha.org/ * The survey has tracked changes in health issues and trends over the last decade, enabling both ACHA and institutions of higher education to adequately identify factors affecting academic performance, respond to questions and concerns about the health of the nation's students, develop a means to address these concerns, and ultimately improve the health and welfare of those students.
ACUHO-I/EBI	http://www.acuho-i.org/Resources/Benchmarking/tabid/87/Default.aspx • Based on ACUHO-I/CAS professional standards, the Association of College and University Housing Officers International (ACUHO-I), in partnership with EBI, provide three national assessments: ACUHO-I/EBI Resident Assessment ACUHO-I/EBI Student Staff Assessment ACUHO-I/EBI Apartment Assessment
Profile of the American College Student	Administered by NASPA and powered by *CampusLabs* the instrument provides institutions with a descriptive portrait of students from first year to senior year.

Note: Adapted, in part, from "Assessment Instrument Resources for Student Affairs Practitioners" by J. Scott (n. d.). Copyright n. d. by University of Georgia.

Student affairs professionals have a plethora of tools with which to assess and measure student learning. Assessment scholar Borden (2001) oversaw a project supported by the American Council on Education (ACE), the Association for Institutional Research (AIR), and the National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) wherein over 250 assessment instruments and services specifically designed for purchase and consumption by higher education were assembled.

Use of indirect and direct methods has been suggested (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Bresciani et al., 2004; & Maki, 2004; Hernon, 2009). "Measuring the extent to which student learning outcomes are met requires the use of either direct or indirect methods for gathering quantitative or qualitative evidence" (Hernon, 2009, p. 32). Connection of the methodology of student learning is paramount. As Banta and Kuh (1998) explained, "both the institution and students are disadvantaged as cognitive development and its measurement are artificially consigned to the classroom and outside-class activities proceed on their own track, unconnected to the knowledge and skills faculty aim to cultivate in their students" (p. 45).

Data Analysis and Dissemination

Literature routinely referenced key tenets of assessment data analysis. An example of one such tenet was a directive to connect analysis to student learning (Maki, 2004; Suskie, 2004). According to Bresciani et al., (2009), "Student learning and development are at the center of any college or university mission and, therefore, serve as the guiding principles of the majority of academic and student affairs work" (p. 27). A second frequently cited tenet is to analyze data in connection to institutional and divisional mission (Huba & Freed, 2000; Maki, 2004). Also frequently cited is advice to design analysis in keeping with the audience (legislatures, administrators, students, parents) (Manning & Stage, 2003). Researchers agree that the results of outcomes-based assessment are fruitless if they are not shared with appropriate stakeholders and implemented effectively (Bresciani, 2007; Maki, 2004; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Schuh et al., 2001; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996)" (Bresciani et al., 2009, p. 28).

Considerations for the dissemination of assessment data purported that "Reporting needs not take the form of simply a written report; alternative forms of reporting assessment results should be used to ensure that information is accessed, consumed, and becomes a part of the

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institutional decision-making and practice" (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 104). Ideally an "assessment system would provide public institutional-level information…" "public" in the sense that they are available to everyone in the college community. Moreover, … such data are routinely talked about and acted upon by a community ever dedicated to improving its own performance" (Barr & Tagg, 1995, p. 21).

Several authors (Bresciani et al., 2009; Maki, 2004; Suskie, 2004) outlined versions of process to be undertaken to analyze and disseminate results of assessment. As Maki (2004), explained, the analysis should include

> Team-based time following an initial presentation to interpret those results (What
> interpretations emerge from teams of faulty, staff, students, and other members of the
> larger community?...) (Maki, p. 161)

Uses of Assessment Data

Scholars (Bresciani et al., 2004; Green, Jones, & Aloi, 2008; Peterson & Vaughan, 2002) found that data in student affairs is often designed, implemented, and reviewed for the purpose of program improvement rather than accountability. Similarly to those scholars, Palomba and Banta (1999) noted, "Attention to the way assessment is carried out invariably points to opportunities for improvement" (p. 15). Cubarrubia (2009) noted that

> Assessment fulfills two complementary but sometimes divergent purposes: improvement
> and accountability. Ewell (2002b) called this dualism the "core dilemma" (p. 7) of higher
> education in that each purpose requires a different approach and utilizes different tools.
> Indeed, each purpose is viewed differently by the higher education community.
> Assessment for improvement is generally welcomed as part of institutional management;
> assessment for accountability is often viewed with disdain. (p. 79)

Although the literature calls for connecting the data generated from assessment to strategic planning, there is little evidence of how units within student affairs divisions, or how divisions as a whole, use assessment data to improve student learning or their own professional practice.

For example, Bresciani et al. (2009) observed, "Assessment data yield information about potential strengths and weaknesses in planning, programming, and policy making and provide a systematic means for effective decision making. Such data may also inform strategic planning efforts by helping create priorities…" (p. 27). Further, literature suggests that appropriate use of assessment data can result in the perpetuation of student learning (Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009). "By using the results of assessment in developing programs, services, and policies, student affairs professionals can ensure student learning remains at the core of their work" (Bresciani et al., 2009, p. 27). Each author speaks to what can be done as opposed to narrating how to directly attribute student affairs activity to data, and data to strategic planning.

In order for assessment data to be utilized properly the perspectives of three major audiences will need to be considered.

- Level 1 – customers, students, those for whom the institution exists

- Level 2 – service providers

- Level 3 – organization-wide issues from Administrators (space, staff, funding, student information, systems) (Witkin & Altschuld, 1995)

Several authors have stated constituencies as key but have articulated constituencies differently. McPherson and Shulenburger (2006) referred to key constituencies as "Prospective students, current students and their parents, faculty and campus support staff, public policy-makers as well as public and private funders of higher education" (p. 5). Each audience will consume and use data differently than the other.

Varied means to practice. The most current National Center for Education Statistics data available at the time of this writing, reported 6,742 postsecondary Title IV two and four-year institutions in the United States (U.S. Department of Education - National Center for Education Statistics, 2012). Each of these institutions has varied identities and the student affairs divisions within them house departments that are sectioned in a variety of ways.

> [N]o one school is exactly the same as another in terms of the departments and services they provide. Institutional size and mission determines what services student affairs provide and what departments are considered to be part of the student affairs division as a whole. (Miller, 2007, p. 2)

Differentiated methods to assess student learning and divergent student learning opportunities differ from institution to institution. "Primary in the mission and goals of every postsecondary institution is education itself-the process that students may experience as learning" (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 4). "Student affairs divisions and academic departments exist for one primary reason- so that student [*sic*] can learn" (Schroeder, 2003, p. 633). Assessment varies according to campus and student affairs practitioners need to address campus-specific actions that will encourage assessment information use on their own campuses (Palomba & Banta, 1999).

Assessment Implementation

Neither scholars nor practitioners deny that data-gathering activity is occurring. Questions continue to arise regarding the purpose and intent of the activity. "Data have been collected (and filed, piled, and stored). . .[b]ut it seems clear that higher education has not done a very good job of using assessment data to improve student learning (Wehlburg, 2008, p. 3). Lingenfelter (2005) of the National Commission on Accountability concluded:

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- We generate massive, unfocused reports on every conceivable aspect of higher education that generally go unread and unused;

- States are developing complex, burdensome "incentive budgeting" schemes to motivate us to do what we should be doing anyway;

- We can't answer straight-forward questions about success rates in higher education, and we are defensive about the graduation rates reported by the system we helped design;

- We have sticker prices that have grown much faster than inflation, and we cannot provide straight-forward answers to questions about net price to undergraduate students and changes over time; and

- We don't have good answers when asked, "Have students learned what they need to know? (p. 1)

Criticism of the assessment implementation process has been well documented from scholars and practitioners within and external to the student affairs field. "Scholars contend that whether assessment is primarily engaged in for internal or for external purposes may influence the nature of an institution's assessment approach, degree of internal support, and assessment uses and impacts" (Peterson, Augustine, Einarson, & Vaughan, 1999, p. 29).

Researchers are also stressing the importance of balancing concerns about the assessment of learning (certification and quality assurance) with assessment for learning (student learning and lifelong learning) (Bloxham & Boyd 2007). Assessment for learning improvement (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Suskie, 2009) included (a) evaluating the current state, (b) providing insight into what should be continued or changed to maximize performance, and (c) motivating professionals to take action (Swing, 2004). According to Keeling et al. (2008),

the assessment of learning explores how effective engagement with the institution

increased students' ability, skill or competency in various domains as a result of various

learning experiences – a curriculum, academic major, certificate program, course,

specific classroom activity, [or] student development experience. (p. 4)

The important distinction is needed as practitioners and researchers are solidifying the

purpose of assessment activity. Such delineation will remain important for all activity undertaken

by student affairs assessment committees. Without deciding on such an important distinction,

committee work can become muddled; divergent purposes will emerge; and the assessment

implementation stage will fail. As a result, practitioners could find themselves amid the

sentiment articulated by student affairs specific assessment authors:

We are accustomed to reading reports about the number of students who live in our

residence halls, are found responsible for violations of the code of conduct, or participate

in certain recreational options. We have grades, credit hours, retention percentages, and

graduation rates to tell us the throughput of students in the academic enterprise. But what

is missing-and what the public now demands-are data that answer key, if uncomfortable

questions' So what? What difference does it all make?" (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 5)

Student affairs literature consistently cites collaboration or cross-institutional work as the

strength of assessment implementation. In a historic-focused discussion on student affairs

assessment, Ewell (2002a) noted:

As institutions scrambled to "implement assessment," it was probably inevitable that they

would evolve similar approaches. And despite repeated admonitions to ground

assessment in each institution's distinctive mission and student clientele, they approached

the task of implementation in very similar ways. As a first step, most formed committees

to plan and oversee the work. Following widespread recommendations about the importance of faculty involvement, most comprised faculty drawn from multiple disciplines. But partly because the press to implement was so great, assessment committees rarely became a permanent feature of governance or of academic administration. (p. 13)

Ewell's reference to student affairs assessment history makes clear that there is a level of common performance across institutions regarding the implementation of assessment. It is evident that collaboration from a wide institutional perspective is needed when carrying out assessment. Often cited in student affairs literature is the need for student affairs to collaborate with academic affairs toward promoting student learning. The concept of collaborations between student and academic affairs, addressed throughout this work, is important in each part of the process: student learning, assessment, and strategic planning.

The implementation process also requires thought of who will participate because the groups chosen to participate in the assessment process, in many cases, will impact the methods used to collect the data (Schuh, 2009) and implement the plan. As in any research process, the problem will guide the data collection method. Dependent upon the type of problem being addressed by the assessment, the chosen committee will need to decide if implementation will be web-based or a paper-and-pencil instrument. Other factors to take into account are access, cost, and time which should all be addressed in the assessment plan. For-profit business has increasingly recognized the cost associated with assessment and has responded by providing data management, collection, books, surveys, and assessment instruments (Hutchings, 2009).

The cost of assessment implementation is a major concern because the activity of assessment is not always a yearly line item for ongoing activity but viewed as a special annual

activity (Ewell, 2002a). Early assessment practitioners experienced uncertainty that their work would continue due to cost concerns (Ewell, 2002a). Such practitioners were also exposed to "how to" publications that addressed financial issues (Ewell & Jones, 1986), indicating that the expense of assessment activity would need to be secured by the student affairs professional. Historical and contemporary practice illustrated that it is important to gain buy-in and institutional representation from the committee, but also to work with those capable of funding assessment activity.

Assessment implementation should have a direct connection to student learning (Keeling et al., 2008). One of the major purposes of the assessment implementation process is not to focus on individual student performance, but rather the collective educational experience of students during their post-secondary experience. "Perhaps the most confounding obstacle to full implementation of learning outcomes assessment programs is the misperception that such programs focus on individual students or faculty. Assessment of student learning is directed at measuring cognitive gains in the aggregate" (Middaugh, 2007, p. 26).

Many assessment programs are concerned with knowledge, skills, attitudes, values and outcomes that reflect on the success of individual students. Authors (Maki, 2004; Middaugh, 2007) are clear in stating that when assessing, practitioners are not to assess individual students, but rather to use aggregate data to assess a population of students. Not only have scholars noted that assessment and student learning are inexorably intertwined, but also that the process of connecting the two is a process, continuous and divergent in nature (Keeling et al., 2008).

Responsible for assessment. P. Lake (personal communication, August 12, 2008), Stetson Law Professor stated, "I predict that banks who provide student loans will begin to litigate against institutions for repayment of those loans when students do not graduate. Further, I

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predict that this circumstance will be impossible for student affairs to ignore". Lake (2001) also wrote "There is no reason why a university may act without regard to the consequences of its actions while every other legal entity is charged with acting as a reasonably prudent person would in like or similar circumstances" (p. 531). Litigation will not remedy the issue of structured student learning as a result of student affairs activity. Kuh (2001) warned, "sooner or later, colleges and universities are either going to demonstrate what their students are learning or some external entity will impose its own approach" (p. 10). Since the time of Kuh's statement, accountability has folded into most areas of the everyday business of college and university dealings, specifically student affairs-specific student learning. Websites like pic-a-prof.com and ratemyprofessors.com illustrate to student affairs that consumers will begin to craft self-made measures to place onus on individuals directly responsible for student learning.

Strategic Planning in Student Affairs

History of Student Affairs Strategic Planning

Strategic planning as a concept began appearing in business literature during the 1940s (Birnbaum, 2000a) and then frequented again in business literature circa 1965 and beyond. Strategic planning became known as the process of "matching the threats and opportunities of the present and future external environment with the distinctive competencies of an organization in such a way as to develop a differential advantage" (Birnbaum, 2000a, p. 64).

Beginning in the 1950s several approaches to strategic planning had been adopted by higher education, and, consequently, student affairs (Birnbaum, 2000a). Komives and Woodard (2003) outlined parallel elements present in many of those works:

These elements include examining critical trends in the environment and assessing threats and opportunities, assessing institutional strengths and weaknesses, determining strategic

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directions based on the institutional mission and assessments of opportunities and

strengths, establishing program priorities, and reallocating resources from low-priority to

high-priority programs. (p. 362)

Komives and Woodard (2003) explained that strategic planning in student affairs or higher

education heavily borrows from military and business perspectives and marks that student affairs

is weak in scholarly contribution to the paradigm of strategic planning. The term has its initial

roots in military and strategy derives from the Greek word "strategos," (Blackerby, 1994),

meaning "general of the army."

Strategic planning has had several roles in history but has occupied a select few roles in

student affairs. The meeting of 25 postsecondary education decision-makers in 1959 at

Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) is considered to be one of the first markers of

campus strategic planning in higher education.

Framework of Student Affairs Strategic Planning (Planning Models)

Strategic planning should be viewed "not as rigid hierarchical sequences of actions, but

as a useful conceptual framework" (Hax & Majluf, 1996, p. 36). According to Bryson (1995),

strategic planning is "a disciplined effort to produce fundamental decisions and actions that

shape and guide what an organization is, what it does, and why it does it" (pp. 4-5). Student

affairs is ever evolving into what it does and why and strategic planning is a process that allows

student affairs practitioners to continuously plan and implement action in accordance with the

organization's missions and goals.

Researchers do not espouse a singular framework for postsecondary strategic planning,

nor student affairs specific strategic planning.

There is no one way to organize a strategic plan. Several templates exist, such as those

created for accreditation purposes, business models, and the public sector. A number of

those who have written about strategic planning believe mission and vision statements are

key to a successful plan (Bryson, 1995; Rowley, Lujan, & Dolence, 1997), while others

struggle with how and when such statements should enter the strategic planning process

(Matthes, 1993; Byars, 1991). (Ellis, 2010, p. 9)

A synthesis of literature illustrated that a commonly used conceptual framework for

student affairs-specific strategic planning (as found in Komives & Woodard, 2003) is based on

the aforementioned elements and other elements such as a ongoing, cyclical, iterative process

which holds decision-makers and stakeholders responsible (McGrath, 1998; Tolmie, 2005;

Gamage & Ueyama, 2006). Komives and Woodard (2003) adapted business market models to fit

the context of student affairs strategic planning.

Initiate the planning process

Review the institution's mission statement

Assess the environment

Develop a vision and goals for success

Develop preliminary plans for each unit

Review preliminary plans

Identify alternatives and determine a final plan

Birnbaum (2000a) cited what he saw in the literature as four basic elements of strategic planning:

"scanning the external environment, assessing internal strengths and weaknesses, analyzing data

drawn from both the institution and its environment, and identifying major directions that would

promote institutional vitality" (Birnbaum, p. 69). The same elements have begun to "make

beneficial, strategic changes ... to adapt to the rapidly shifting environment" (Rowley et al., 1997) in postsecondary professional practice.

A benchmark work in the discussion of strategic planning is that of Mintzberg (1994). His study on strategic planning found "strategy making to be a complex, interactive, and evolutionary process, best described as one of adaptive learning. Strategic change was found to be uneven and unpredictable . . . especially when the organization faced unpredictable shifts in the environment" (p. 110). Bryson and Alston (2010) suggested that "effective strategic planning depends on four key, interconnected functions being performed well: organizing participation, formulating ideas of strategic significance, organizing a coalition to adopt the ideas, and effectively implementing the ideas" (p. 24). Models of strategic planning operation confirmed the prevalent use of the aforementioned elements of strategic planning (Gamage & Ueyama, 2006; Komives & Woodard, 2003; Mintzberg, 1994; Tolmie, 2005). But these models lack the element of cyclical action or "closing the feedback loop." Bryson and Alston's (2010) model refers to interconnected functions, indicating that strategic planning is, as assessment, a cyclical process.

Among other related models found in literature, Middaugh (2009) and Wehlburg (2008) encouraged "closing the loop" or revisiting results and process. Student affairs-specific literature on strategic planning lacks this type of encouragement or direction for practitioners. The associated tasks of assessment and strategic planning in literature differ greatly and have different audiences. The intent of the authors can be evidenced by examining titles such as *Creating and implementing your strategic plan: A workbook for public and nonprofit organizations* (Bryson & Alston, 2010) or *Introduction to strategic planning in student affairs: A*

model for process and elements of a plan (Ellis, 2010). Business and student affairs have varied audiences, yet literature is co-opted from one professional realm to another.

It has been noted that Komives and Woodard (2003) adapted business market models to fit the context of student affairs strategic planning. Prior to 1970 student affairs heavily relied upon "studies about students and student learning conducted by educators formally outside the field of student affairs, especially from those in psychology" (Sandeen & Barr, 2006, p. 133). Practitioners continuously generate literature of practice that is utilized to make connections and plan purposeful work because they are historically vacant in strategic planning, accountability, and student learning literature (Dungy, 2004).

Cited as a good illustration of assessment in student affairs by Schuh (2009), the Division of Student Affairs at the University of (2009) is highlighted as having "identified learning goals for students and provides information about how various student affairs units can contribute to student learning" (p. 7). In addition to having a comprehensive plan to assess student learning outcomes, the University of Oregon has also created a usable figure (Figure 6) to use within the division to create purposeful connections and strategic planning.

South Carolina State University (SCSU) is frequently recognized on institutional student affairs assessment websites as having cyclical learning-based methods that include assessment and strategic planning. *CampusLabs* has a generic model (Figure 7.) similar to the University of Oregon and SCSU. Many of the same characteristics are used between the three models. The strongest characteristic includes modeling a systemic or cyclic process that clearly demarcates interconnected activity.

Wehlburg (2008) indicated that

> Transformative assessment is a formative process that reiterates itself in a constantly
>
> improving cycle. When institutional dynamics are focused on what, how, and how much
>
> students are learning and less on demonstrating accountability, they will be moving in the
>
> direction of creating a true culture of learning. (p. 60)
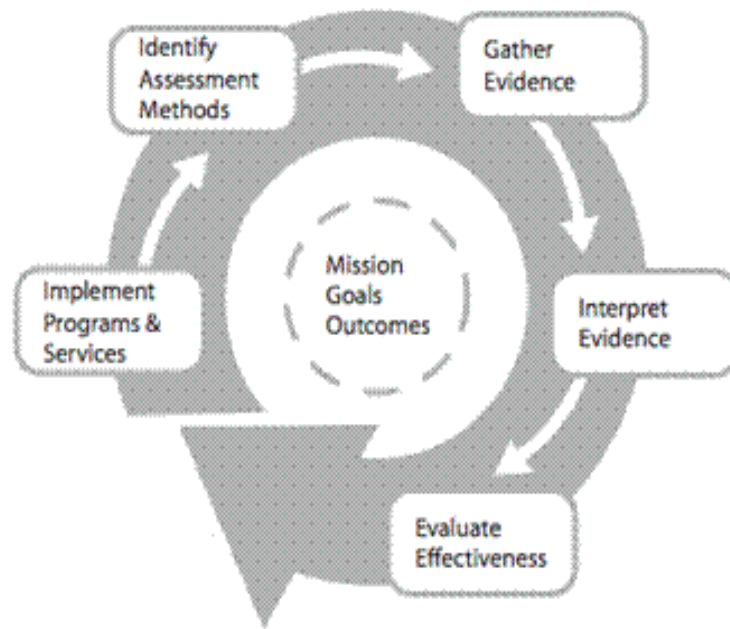
Figure 6. Assessment implementation progress report. (Division of Student Affairs, University
of Oregon, 2009).

The rationale in this provisional framework of strategic planning presumes (a) student

affairs organizes strategic planning in a variety of ways, (b) institutions and divisions therein

operate in cultures of militaristic or business philosophy, and (c) ideally they operate in a closed

loop model allowing divisional operations to be driven by data, effecting change based on such

data.

Relationship to mission. The mission of the student affairs division and the mission of

the institution provide primary guidance for all activity within a division of student affairs. "The

student affairs division mission complements the institution's mission, with the enhancement of

student learning and personal development being the primary goal of student affairs programs

and services" (Hamrick et al. 2002, p. 122). From the institutional mission flows justification for

all activities within the institution; likewise, from the student affairs mission flows activity

within the division.
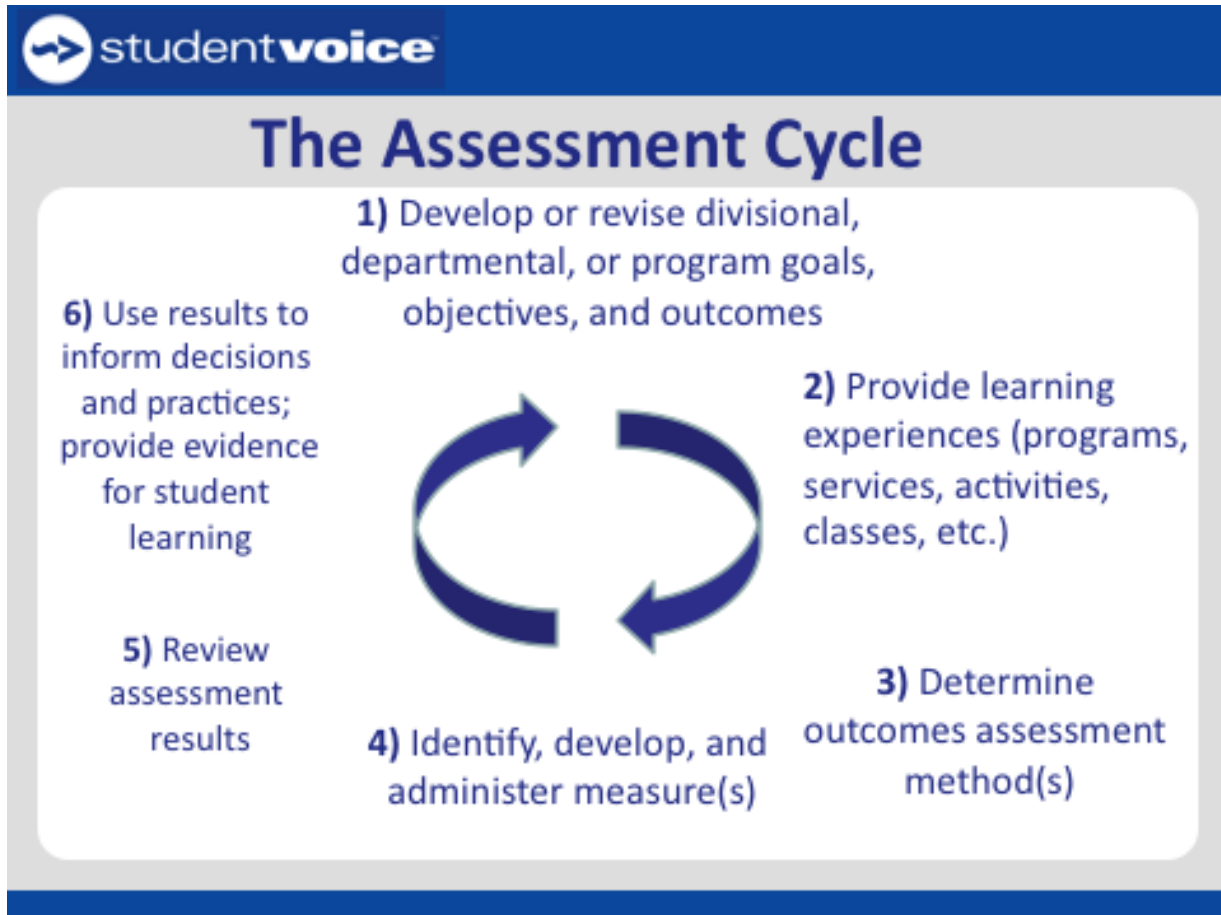
Figure 7. The Assessment Cycle – StudentVoice. (Rice, A. 2009).

> Typically, organizations participate in strategic planning exercises that include a review
>
> of their mission statements and goals, and then adopt action steps that are designed to
>
> achieve their goals (Schuh, 2003). . . .All of these planning activities require effort and
>
> resources; in the end, they are designed to help student affairs units achieve their goals,
>
> thus moving these units in concert with the division's mission. (Schuh, 2009, p. 8)

The purpose of the ACPA (1996) report was "to stimulate discussion and debate on how student affairs professionals can intentionally create the conditions that enhance student learning and personal development" (p. 1). ACPA urged student affairs personnel to work with staff outside their divisions to "co-create the conditions under which students are likely to expend time and energy in educational-purposeful activities" (p. 4) toward accomplishing the mission of their divisions and institutions. ACPA (1996) made clear to student affairs practitioners that their work should be aligned with institutional and divisional missions. In section one of the report the following words were expressed:

> A student affairs division committed to student learning and personal development exhibits the following characteristics: 1. The student affairs division mission complements the institution's mission, with the enhancement of student learning and personal development being the primary goal of student affairs programs and services. (p. 2)

According to the authors, there are four other imperative characteristics of a student affairs division committed to student learning and personal development. They are as follows:

> (2) resources are allocated to encourage student learning and professional development (p. 2);
>
> (3) student affairs professionals collaborate with other institutional agents and agencies to promote student learning and personal development (p. 3);
>
> (4) student affairs divisions includes staff who are experts on students, their environments, and teaching and learning processes; (p. 4) and
>
> (5) student affairs policies and programs are based on promising practices from the research on student learning and institutional specific assessment data. (p. 5)

Questions and challenges posed by the first characteristic ask the following questions:

1. Does the division's mission statement explicitly address student learning and personal development as the primary objectives of student affairs?

2. Do staff understand, agree with, and perform in ways congruent with this mission?

3. What must staff know to implement this mission? (ACPA, 1996, p. 2)

The flow of major reports on the status of higher education has provided unique opportunities, and even obligations, for student affairs educators to collaborate with their institutional colleagues on improving the quality of student experience on their campuses (Schroeder, 2003, p. 618). Several groups have published reports and theories such as The Wingspread Group (1993), ACPA (1996), and NASPA (1997). Each indicated that promoting student learning and development is the responsibility of both student and academic affairs. NASPA and ACPA (2004) promoted the idea of integration of an institution's educational resources to develop "the whole student." Both organizations proposed: "Student affairs professionals are educators who share responsibility with faculty, academic administrators, other staff, and students themselves for creating conditions" (NASPA & ACPA, 2004, p. 2).

Berson, Engelkermeyer, Oliaro, Potter, Terenzini, and Walker-Johnson, (1998) stated, "only when everyone on campus – particularly academic affairs and student affairs staff – shares the responsibility for student learning will we be able to make significant progress in improving it" (p. 1). These calls proved it necessary for student affairs divisions to strategically plan for increased student learning by aligning with academic partners and the mission of the institution in which it is housed. An argument can be made that the reason that campuses offer many programs and activities is that these opportunities can be framed by the institution's objectives for student learning and that they contribute to student learning and growth (NASPA, 2004); "but

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for units to claim that they contribute to the student experience . . . data are required" (NASPA, 2004, p. 13).

Accrediting agencies also make clear and insist that assessments be used to support planning and resource allocation (Middaugh, 2007). The Middle States Commission on Higher Education standard two states:

> An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality. (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006, p. 4)

Relationship to student learning outcomes. Student affairs-specific literature has addressed the role of student affairs divisions in strategically creating student learning (ACE, 1949; Baxter Magolda, 1998, 2003; Blimling & Whitt, 1998; Hu & Kuh, 2003; Kezar, 2001; Kuh, 1996; Lovett, 2006; NASPA & ACPA, 2004; Sandeen, 2004; Whitt, 2006), yet this literature is devoid of explanations about how to weave or connect assessment, strategic planning, or student learning. A connection that is frequently cited is the relationship between professional collaboration and student learning.

> Because assessment is a complex process, it lends itself to collaborative practice. Within the context of higher education, collaborative practice usually and routinely requires participation by four common constituencies: 1) students 2) faculty members 3) student affairs professionals, and 4) community. (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 13)

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Merging assessment and student learning is strategic planning and merging student learning to mission is strategic planning work. Student affairs specific authors agree that student affairs practitioners should center efforts on student learning, and concurrently be concerned with its assessment (Dungy, 2009; Green et al., 2008; Keeling, 2004; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Schuh & Upcraft, 2001; Upcraft, 2003). The same authors do not write with the same rigor on how student learning is connected to strategic planning.

Another method used by institutions (and the divisions therein) to focus on student learning is to align an entire institution with mandatory accreditation processes and non-mandatory standards promulgated by student affairs professional organizations. Six regional accrediting agencies exist in the United States (U.S. Department of Education, 2012). Only two regional agencies define standards and compliance as jointly related to student learning and assessment. The accreditation standard for assessing student learning outcomes through the Middle States Commission on Higher Education states:

"Standard 14: Assessment of student learning demonstrates that, at graduation, or other appropriate points, the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional and appropriate higher education goals" (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006, p. 63).

The commission is also explicit in how this standard will be critiqued or how it can be accomplished:

- Clear statements of expected student learning outcomes at the course, department/discipline, and institutional level (no more "undefined level of mastery") that are integrated with each other and are consistent with the institution's mission.

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- Use of multiple measures that describe student learning, that are clearly tied to the goals they are assessing and can be used to improve teaching and learning.

- Assessment results that provide sufficient, convincing evidence that students are achieving key institutional and program level learning outcomes.

- Documented use of student learning assessment information as a central component of assessing institutional effectiveness (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006, pp. 66–67).

Common ground and definition of learning must be established and shared by everyone in order for a successful collaboration to come to fruition. Different sections of student affairs and/or an institution have many different ideas about learning. But "the purpose of producing a common view of undergraduate learning is to generate discussion among faculty, academic administrators, student affairs professionals, and students about "what matters" in undergraduate education" (Kuh, 1996, p. 138).

Mutual understanding is a crucial step for success because resistance can easily form if concepts and terms that not everyone understands are used. To prevent these divisions from forming, Kuh (1996) explained:

a common language must be developed to create and communicate what is to be accomplished, to discuss what factors contribute to student learning, to examine mental models productively, and to view all this from the "big picture," or systemic frame of reference. (p. 139)

Student-learning outcomes become more credible and successful if a common language is shared. In juxtaposition, institutional diversity rejects "relying on one method to assess the learning. . . [because it] restricts interpretations of student achievement within the parameters of

that method" (Maki, 2004, p. 86). Student affairs professionals in Texas, for example, clearly have a different agenda in terms of student learning outcomes than student affairs professionals in urban Boston. There are very few methods to simultaneously create effective linkages and prove accountability across institutions.

> Even though institutions of various kinds may be quite different, administrators still tend to discuss issues of college and university faculty, governance, structure, and processes as if that were not true and to support normative ideas such as "shared authority" without regard for organizational differences…administrators should be aware that the management subsystems of two different institutions are likely to be different…then their management systems should vary. We must therefore learn to be wary of any normative statement of administration or management that does not clearly specify the characteristics of the type of organization to which it is to apply. (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 54)

Major Goals and Purposes of Strategic Planning

Strategic planning, if implemented correctly, causes positive systemic change. Systemic change is "an effort to view the institution as a whole because change is difficult without an understanding of all the structures, factors, and cultures" (Kezar, 2001, p. 65). Kuh (1996) stated, "systemic thinking demands a broad, inclusive understanding of the complex nature of the institution" (p. 142). Connection of thinking values collaboration and institutionally integrates vision, values, and mission. This type of systemic change concerns changing the whole and not one specific part. "Strategic planning is a formal process designed to help a university identify and maintain an optimal alignment with the most important elements the environment... within which the university resides." These environs are "the political, social, economic, technological,

and educational ecosystem, both internal and external to the university" (Rowley et al., 1997, pp. 14-15).

Leaders and managers of organizations must think and act strategically if their organizations are to compete (Bryson & Alston, 2010). Doyle noted "if student affairs wants not only to survive, but also to prosper, it must demonstrate to the rest of the institution that it holds itself accountable for achieving not only the division's mission, but also the institution's mission" (2004, p. 391). It is typical for organizations to address strategic planning by examining their mission statements and goals, and then approving action steps to facilitate the achievement of those goals (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). All strategic planning activity should connect to the divisional mission (Rowley et al., 1997). This includes divisional movement internal and external to the classroom – funding decisions, meetings, and memos – each detail, all should reflect back to student learning. "Student learning becomes, then a focus at the level of institutional decision making and planning, a focus that marks a serious commitment to improving programs and the quality of education" (Maki, 2004, p. 7). Keeling (2004) asserted:

> learning must be reconsidered — that new research, changing times, and needs of today's emerging generations of students require that our traditionally distinct categories of academic learning and student development be fused in an integrated, comprehensive vision of learning as a transformative process that is centered in and responsive to the whole student. Every resource on campus should be used to achieve transformative liberal education for all students, and all colleges and universities are accountable for establishing and assessing specific student outcomes that reflect this integrated view of learning." (p. 35)

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Strategic planning implementation and tasks. Practitioners in the division of Student

Affairs – University of Oregon (Division of Student Affairs – University of Oregon, 2009)

indicated that committee work is needed to articulate the vision, mission, goals, objectives, and

outcomes contributory to desired results. Other goals for strategic planning include determination

of responsibilities and timelines and asking if the responsibilities will lie within members of the

strategic planning committee. Those goals also include understanding if other institutional-based

individuals will be involved. These factors dictate the successful implementation of the plan.

Strategic planning is related to assessment. The Middle States Commission on Higher

Education standard two stated, "Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the

strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve

and to maintain quality" (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006, p. 4). Schuh

and Upcraft (2001) stated, "Assessment contributes to strategic planning by helping to define

goals and objectives and pointing to critical issues or problems that must be resolved

successfully if the organization is to achieve its goals" (p. 11). The authors continued by

explaining that assessment is especially important in the early phases of strategic planning to

identity strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities for the future. There are very few examples of

how this connection occurs in practice within student affairs-specific literature. Models continue

to be adopted by student affairs from other industries.

Strategic planning analysis and dissemination. Student affairs divisions will

conventionally employ their institutions' Office of Institutional Research or the committee's

resident experts (often faculty) who can contribute the benefits of scholarly aptitude to strategic

planning and data analysis processes. Such individuals are commonly involved and are familiar

with standards and requirements from external bodies (i.e. accreditation). This includes shifting

the strategic planning data-collection process to planning; and, finally, analysis and dissemination. Because of "requirements for compliance with standards on assessing. . .effectiveness and student learning necessitate a systematic, comprehensive approach to data collection. That said, it is a short step from comprehensive data collection to formulation of a plan" (Middaugh, 2007, p. 17).

Publishing the strategic plan and the data resultant of a strategic plan serves notice to stakeholders of student affairs. "The units themselves can develop the strategies for collecting and analyzing the data, but it makes good sense to have material available on a web site to begin to tell the story of the contributions of the division of student affairs to student life" (Schuh, 2009, p. 12).

Uses of strategic planning. Just as strategic planning based on assessment results can be used to increase student learning opportunities, it "can be utilized in any type of reorganizing or restructuring of a student affairs department or other areas of a college. . .when determining which student affairs programs to continue, eliminate or scale back on" (Miller, 2007, p. 5). According to the Middle States Commission on Higher Education standard two: "An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal" (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006, p. 4). The renewal process includes strategic planning from the assessment data. The data gives power to what choices are made at the table of strategic planning. Because accrediting agencies do not sharply define suitable methods to disseminate information, personnel within institutions are free to interpret intentions of accrediting agencies. As an example, accrediting agencies such as the Middle States Commission on Higher Education promulgate strategic planning standards for participating

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institutions, but participating institutions differ in how each impose the methods to operationalize standards. Table 8 provides statements from each of the six major U.S. regional accrediting agencies that address strategic planning in relation to member institutions and, by association, divisions of student affairs housed within those institutions.

Fiscal underpinning. It is imperative in turbulent fiscal years for senior student affairs officers to understand how finances and activity operate for the larger institution so that they can advocate for and insure fiscal responsibility within their own areas. One way to accomplish monetary responsibility from fiscal year to fiscal year is to plan strategically. "Successful strategic planning can help create grounded, future forward budgets for student affairs departments" (Miller, 2007, p. 4) and be "used as a precursor to budgeting" (p. 6). Forecasting student and other fiscal trends are important to student affairs.

Not all professionals are comfortable with fiscal planning and understanding strategic planning and budgeting. Varied skill sets exist within student affairs and among student affairs professionals. Varying levels of fiscal skill can have devastating effects on the student body, leaving student affairs professionals to rethink their forecasting methods.

> Although research on the issue of financing student affairs programs is limited and at times more anecdotal than statistical, student affairs staff have proven to be creative and hard working when it comes to dealing with reductions in budgets, personnel, revenue or enrollment. (Miller, 2007, p. 15)

Student affairs work is executed from year to year regardless of funding levels. As student affairs develops effective plans, forecasts trends for divisional needs, and accounts for losses responsibly, is each technique justifiable, practical, and in accordance to what is most effective for increased student learning? Practitioners in student affairs could utilize what is

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effective and monitor the success of resources in accordance with student-learning results. It is

important to keep in mind that each particular institution is unique in how it situates student

affairs and departments within its respective student affairs divisions.

Table 8

Strategic Planning Statements of U. S. Accrediting Agencies

Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Higher Education

Standard 2
Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals, develops objectives to achieve them, and utilizes the results of its assessment activities for institutional renewal. Implementation and subsequent evaluation of the success of the strategic plan and resource allocation support the development and change necessary to improve and to maintain institutional quality.

New England Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

Standard Two: Planning and Evaluation

The institution undertakes planning and evaluation appropriate to its needs to accomplish and improve the achievement of its mission and purposes. It identifies its planning and evaluation priorities and pursues them effectively.

2.1 Planning and evaluation are systematic, comprehensive, broad-based, integrated, and appropriate to the institution. They involve the participation of individuals and groups responsible for the achievement of institutional purposes. Results of planning and evaluation are regularly communicated to appropriate institutional constituencies. The institution allocates sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts.

2.2 The institution undertakes short- and long-term planning, including realistic analyses of internal and external opportunities and constraints. The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support its planning efforts and to enhance institutional effectiveness. It plans for and responds to financial and other contingencies, establishes feasible priorities, and develops a realistic course of action to achieve identified objectives. Institutional decision-making, particularly the allocation of resources, is consistent with planning priorities.

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission

[The Criteria for Accreditation are organized under five major headings. Each Criterion has three elements: Criterion Statement, Core Components, and Examples of Evidence.]

Criterion Two: Preparing for the Future
Criterion Statement: The organization's allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of its education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.

Core Component 2d: All levels of planning align with the organization's mission, thereby enhancing its capacity to fulfill that mission.

Table 8. *Strategic Planning Statements of U. S. Accrediting Agencies (continued)*

Examples of Evidence

- Coordinated planning processes center on the mission documents that define vision, values, goals, and strategic priorities for the organization.

- Planning processes link with budgeting processes.

- Implementation of the organization's planning is evident in its operations.

_____

- Long-range strategic planning processes allow for reprioritization of goals when necessary because of changing environments.

- Planning documents give evidence of the organization's awareness of the relationships among educational quality, student learning, and the diverse, complex, global, and technological world in which the organization and its students exist.

Planning processes involve internal constituents and, where appropriate, external constituents.

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

Standard 1.B – Planning and Effectiveness

The institution engages in ongoing planning to achieve its mission and goals. It also evaluates how well, and in what ways, it is accomplishing its mission and goals and uses the results for broad-based, continuous planning and evaluation. Through its planning process, the institution asks questions, seeks answers, analyzes itself, and revises its goals, policies, procedures, and resource allocation.

1.B.1 The institution clearly defines its evaluation and planning processes. It develops and implements procedures to evaluate the extent to which it achieves institutional goals.

1.B.2   The institution engages in systematic planning for, and evaluation of, its activities, including teaching, research, and public service consistent with institutional mission and goals.

1.B.3 The planning process is participatory involving constituencies appropriate to the institution such as board members, administrators, faculty, staff, students, and other interested parties.

1.B.4 The institution uses the results of its systematic evaluation activities and ongoing planning processes to influence resource allocation and to improve its instructional programs, institutional services, and activities.

1.B.5   The institution integrates its evaluation and planning processes to identify institutional priorities for improvement.

Table 8. *Strategic Planning Statements of U. S. Accrediting Agencies (continued)*

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

Core Requirement 2.5

The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.

Core Requirement 2.12

The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that (1) includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution, (3) demonstrates institutional capability for the initiation, implementation, and completion of the QEP, (4) includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in the development and proposed implementation of the QEP, and (5) identifies goals and a plan to assess their achievement. (Quality Enhancement Plan)

Western Association of Colleges and Schools Accrediting Commission of Senior Colleges and Universities

Standard 4
Creating an Organization Committed to Learning and Improvement

The institution conducts sustained, evidence-based, and participatory discussions about how effectively it is accomplishing its purposes and achieving its educational objectives. These activities inform both institutional planning and systematic evaluations of educational effectiveness. The results of institutional inquiry, research, and data collection are used to establish priorities at different levels of the institution and to revise institutional purposes, structures, and approaches to teaching, learning, and scholarly work.

Criteria for Review
4.1 The institution periodically engages its multiple constituencies, including faculty, in institutional reflection and planning processes, which assess its strategic position, articulate priorities, examine the alignment of its purposes, core functions and re- sources, and define the future direction of the institution. The institution monitors the effectiveness of its plans and planning processes, and revises them as appropriate.

4.2 Planning processes at the institution define and, to the extent possible, align academic, personnel, fiscal, physical, and technological needs with the strategic objectives and priorities of the institution.

4.3 Planning processes are informed by appropriately defined and analyzed quantitative and qualitative data, and include consideration of evidence of educational effectiveness, including student learning.

Sources: Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006; New England Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, 2005, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission, 2011; Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, 2003; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2008; Western Association of Colleges and Schools Accrediting Commission of Senior Colleges and Universities, 2008.

Who is responsible? The aforementioned 3-year longitudinal research project of

Pascarella and Terenzini as well as other student affairs scholars'/philosophers' suggested

blurring the boundaries and field-specific alignment with institutional mission and those outside

the division. Without the assistance of academic and student affairs, student affairs can become absorbed by conversations of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning from an institutional or academic affairs point of view. This point is reminiscent of the above American Council on Education (1937; 1949) statements where the primary focus was on institutional accountability rather than on student affairs-specific accountability. Student affairs practitioners must consume and create their own literature base to insure co-creation and circumvent tangled agendas with individuals outside the field. At the same time, practitioners must remain collaborative.

> As transformative educators, student affairs practitioners play a crucial role in the way college and university communities are structured. Conventionally, student affairs professionals are seen as being concerned primarily with student out-of-class experiences. . .If student affairs professionals are to have a significant impact on students' overall development, they must be actively involved in shaping the larger academic community. This requires engaging other faculty and staff in campus change. (Rhoads & Black, 1995, p. 418)

Link Between Student Affairs Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning Background and Historical Context

Keeling et al. (2008) asserted, "[Bloom's] taxonomies of learning are an invaluable tool for linking assessment to learning" (p. 25). Schuh (2009) labeled one of his subtexts "Linking Assessment to Organizational Functions in Student Affairs". Middaugh (2010) mentions "inextricable linkage" (p. 1) in the first sentence of the book and, later in the same text, writes under the subtext "Linking Planning and Assessment" (p. 31). Hollowell et al. (2006) addressed strategies for informing strategic planning activity with assessment results. Contributors to

student affairs literature have begun to outline the need for connection and relationship in student affairs specific-assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. Praxis that cyclically aligns student affairs assessment activity, any resultant student learning, and strategic planning is key to constructing a united front to quiet major skepticism of student affairs work. Assessment, strategic planning, and student learning have not been individually influential in proving the effectiveness of student affairs work to the range of stakeholders. When used jointly, the three become more operational and applicable for a wider audience of constituents.

The call to prove purposeful linkages in student affairs work increased with the end of the twentieth century and the dawn of the twenty-first. Prior to 1970 student affairs heavily relied upon "studies about students and student learning conducted by educators formally outside the field of student affairs, especially from those in psychology" (Sandeen & Barr, 2006, p. 133). "Subsequent to 1965, the amount and quality of research within student affairs dramatically increased" (Sandeen & Barr, 2006, p. 142).

> But by the early 1990s, the foundations of a recognizable published literature could be discerned. Some of these works were by established scholars, who summarized findings and provided methodological advice (Astin, 1991; Pace, 1990). Others tried to document assessment approaches in terms that practitioner audiences could readily understand (Ewell, 1991). Still others continued the process of documenting institutional cases— of which there were now many—in standard or summary form. (Banta, 2002, p. 14)

Much of the frequently cited contemporary research focuses directly on student learning specific to student affairs. Examples of books include Kuh, et al. (1991); Pascarella and Terenzini (1991, 2005); and Upcraft and Schuh (1996). Examples of influential association and commission reports include the National Institute of Higher Education (NIHE; 1984); The

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Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs (Schroeder; 1996); Wingspread Group (1993); Kellogg Commission on the Future of State and Land-Grant Universities (1997), and NASPA and ACPA (1997). These calls added to the field's literature and delineated student affairs personnel as contributors to student learning and as well as extracurricular development (American Council on Education [ACE], 1983; ACPA, 1996; NAPSA, 1987; Wingspread Group, 1993; NASPA & ACPA, 1997, 2004; Berson et al., 1998; Whitt & Miller, 1999).

Student Affairs Linkage Models

Common threads that link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning in student affairs, as shown in this literature review, have been systemic methods, activity rooted in the institutional and divisional missions, and divisional activity as underpinning student learning. Effective linkages between assessment and planning for student-learning outcomes are those where measures of student learning inform and drive the institution's [or division's] planning process. "Closely related to its role in strategic planning is how assessment can assist in measuring the effectiveness of various elements of departments in student affairs" (Schuh, 2009, p. 9). There are a few models in student affairs practice and literature that encourage the connection of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. Below are some examples.

The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) has been in existence for over 30 years and was founded to promulgate professional standards and guidelines. Today divisions and units therein can utilize the organizations 7th edition book of standards to provide tangible evidence of student learning. The book outlines 35 areas such as outcomes assessment and program evaluation. (See other areas in Appendix J.)

CAS is capable of leading a team of practitioners through a set of questions that include standards and guidelines related to a given student affairs unit. CAS provides a Self-Assessment

Guide for each set of standards and guidelines that includes a comprehensive self-study process

for program evaluation (CAS, 2009). Practitioners can choose to provide artifacts such as

documents, posters, or other correspondence that illustrate the extent to which a standard or

guideline has been met.

> All CAS standards use the auxiliary verbs "must" and "shall" and appear in bold print so
>
> that users can quickly identify them . . .all functional areas have specialty standards in
>
> addition to the general standards. Specialty standards are essential to accomplishing a
>
> support program's purpose and appear in bold print as do the general standards . . .
>
> Guidelines use the auxiliary verbs "should" and "may" and are printed in lightface type to
>
> distinguish them from the standards. (CAS, 2009, p. 1)

CAS published *Frameworks for Assessing Learning and Development Outcomes* in 2006

in an attempt to utilize the field's most up-to-date thinking (Bresciani, 2007). CAS modified the

16 learning and developmental outcomes from the 6th edition in 2008 to incorporate the work of

Learning Reconsidered 2.

Publications of NASPA and ACPA (2004), and Keeling (2006), are used within the field

of student affairs to associate functionality to "the integrated use of all of higher education's

resources in the education and preparation of the whole student" (NASPA & ACPA, 2004, p. 1).

Another publication seen as a linkage tool in student affairs is Keeling et al. (2008). The text

focuses on assessment for accountability as well as assessment to increase student learning.

Resources are available to the profession but "the struggle continues for most student

affairs professionals and programs to move beyond discourse and beyond individual assessment

projects or programs focused on particular problems to integrating and incorporating assessment

as a fundamental aspect of effective student affairs practice" (Love & Estanek, 2004, p. 83).

Relationship to Mission

Student-learning outcomes help actualize the institutional mission and outcomes. Mission and learning outcomes will differ by institution. Each level of a respective institution and each unit within those student affairs divisions can have a different idea about student-learning outcomes and what they mean. One must largely define student-learning outcomes and how to use them wisely from campus to campus before one can simply state specific normative student affairs characteristics for every institution and the levels within the institutions. Student learning is strongly affected by many of the uncontrollable features of an institution, such as size, location, and student profile. One of the more controllable features of institutions is student interaction that student affairs practitioners can help to design to provide congruency for students and their campus environment.

Pascarella and Terenzini (1999) articulated, "professionals can intentionally create the conditions that enhance student learning and development" (p. 610). In addition to what students are learning, practitioners must also be aware of how students are learning. Cerbin (2009) explained:

In higher education the dominant mode of assessment is to measure what students have learned in a course or program. . . . But measuring what students learn is of limited use if our goal is to improve their future performance. It is akin to taking a person's temperature. You may learn the individual has a fever but the measurement produces no insight into the cause. (p. 1)

From this viewpoint, Cerbin (2009) continued:

To reduce the guesswork, we need assessment that reveals how students learn—how they interpret and make sense of the subject, where they stumble, what they do when they do

not understand the material, how they respond to different instructional practices, and so on. Understanding the basis of student performance can help us identify appropriate teaching practices or approaches. (p. 1)

Accrediting bodies sustain the missions of institutions that they accredit by mandate and/or suggestion to provide evidence of student learning. Each accrediting agency contributes to one link, – student learning. Below are statements from each of the six major U.S. regional accrediting agencies that address student learning in relation to the institution and, by association, divisions of student affairs.

Major Goals of Linking Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning

Henning and Elling (2008) reported that 75 % of four-year institutions do not possess a full time assessment professional, and literature does not identify that student affairs divisions commonly utilize strategic planning professionals of any type. Table 9 illustrates U.S. regional accrediting agency statements that encourage connection between assessment and student learning. The primary goal of an educational professional is the education of the student – without whom, higher education, nor student affairs would exist. To help the reader understand reasoning behind linking strategic planning and assessment processes within a student affairs framework, the researcher outlined the process found in Maki's (2004) work. According to Maki, these tasks can be involved in collecting evidence of student learning and using the results to inform practice (strategic planning). Steps include the following:

- Reaching consensus about methods to sample an institution's student population based on what an institution and its programs want to learn

- Identifying contexts and occasions for collecting evidence of student learning through direct and indirect assessment methods

Table 9

Assessment of Student Learning Statements of U. S. Accrediting Agencies

Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Higher Education

Standard 7

Assessment of student learning demonstrates that an institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals, and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals.

New England Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutions of Higher Education

Assessment of Student Learning, Standard 4.44

The institution implements and supports a systematic and broad-based approach to the assessment of student learning focused on educational improvement through understanding what and how students are learning through their academic program and, as appropriate, through experiences outside the classroom. This approach is based on a clear statement or statements of what students are expected to gain, achieve, demonstrate, or know by the time they complete their academic program. The approach provides useful information to help the institution understand what and how students are learning, improve the experiences provided for students, and assure that the level of student achievement is appropriate for the degree awarded. Institutional support is provided for these activities.

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission

Criterion Three: Student Learning and Effective Teaching.

The organization provides evidence of student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.

Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities

The institution offers collegiate level programs that culminate in identified student competencies and lead to degrees or certificates in recognized fields of study. The achievement and maintenance of high quality programs is the primary responsibility of an accredited institution; hence the evaluation of educational programs and their continuous improvement is an ongoing responsibility
.

Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges

2.10 The institution provides student support programs, services, and activities consistent with its mission that promote student learning and enhance the development of its students.

2.12 The institution has developed an acceptable Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) that (1) includes a broad-based institutional process identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment, (2) focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution

Table 9. *Assessment of Student Learning Statements of U. S. Accrediting Agencies (continued)*

Western Association of Colleges and Schools Accrediting Commission of Senior Colleges and Universities

The institution's student learning outcomes and expectations for student attainment are clearly stated at the course, program, and as appropriate, institutional level. These outcomes and expectations are reflected in academic programs and policies; curriculum; advisement; library and information resources; and wider learning environment…The institution demonstrates that its graduates consistently achieve its stated levels of attainment and ensures that its expectations for student learning are embedded in the standards faculty use to evaluate student work.

Sources: Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006; New England Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, 2005, North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission, 2007; Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, 2003; Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2008; Western Association of Colleges and Schools Accrediting Commission of Senior Colleges and Universities, 2001 (Middaugh, 2010). Adapted from Commonality of Standards Across Regional Accrediting Agencies in the United States in *Planning and assessment in higher education: Demonstrating institutional effectiveness* (Middaugh, 2010).

- Scoring student projects, products, work, or responses

- Analyzing results and representing results in ways that promote collective interpretation

- Collectively interpreting and making decisions based on results, such as adapting, modifying, or innovating new ways and developing new approaches to services or support programs

- Re-entering the assessment cycle to determine the efficacy of adaptations, modifications, and innovations. (p. 154)

In another example of linkages, authors Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges and Hayek (2006) explained institutional conditions associated with student success. Most models imposed upon the student affairs field are institutionally focused. The following model has been tailored to be relevant to student affairs practitioners:

1. A clear, focused divisional mission,

2. High standards and expectations for student performance,

3. Assessment and timely feedback,

4. Student learning centered culture,

5. Peer support,

6. Integration of prior learning and experience,

7. Academic support programs tailored to meet student needs,

8. Ongoing application of learned skills,

9. Active learning,

10. Collaboration among student and academic affairs, and among students,

11. Environment that emphasizes support for academic work, and

12. Out-of-class contact with faculty. (p. 1)

Who is Responsible?

Birnbaum (1988) recognized that "organizations can be thought of as composed of three levels of responsibility and control – technical, managerial, and institutional" (p. 19). Each level has a realm of influence and a role steeped in tradition. Such influences and roles may result in "conflicts between rank and prestige [that] may weaken administrative authority and increase the difficulties in coordinating activities" (p. 20). Dependent upon the experience and historic positioning of one's influence and role, activity coordination and effective change can be difficult to institute (Birnbaum, 1988).

Student affairs practitioners in 1965 were aware that they needed to point to student learning to justify the field. Literature that emerged in the late twentieth century served as a continuance of the field's legitimacy (see Table 3). These writings further situated how student affairs practitioners viewed their responsibility but literature review revealed a dearth of research that examines specific student affairs-related student learning, strategic planning, and assessment. "A large volume of work demonstrating what students learn in college is available

but little of this research shows how student affairs programs and personnel directly influence

student outcomes" (Blimling, 1999, p. 54).

> If colleges and universities had been able to consistently and clearly provide multiple
>
> streams of evidence that students are intellectually and socially transformed by higher
>
> education, then the current pressure for accountability from the U.S. Department of
>
> Education and state legislatures would likely be considerably muted. (Middaugh, 2009,
>
> p. 6)

Role of Professional Organizations

Professional organizations construct activity that informs standards and norms of

professions. Professional organizations for student affairs professionals are no exception.

Historical student affairs literature reveals that many standards promulgated by student affairs

related professional organizations have resulted in fads and movements (see Table 1). As the

profession of student affairs ages, thinking about standards has matured.

The first-ever meeting of NASPA was held at the University of Wisconsin in Madison,

January 1919. Then referred to as the Conference of Deans and Advisers of Men until its name

change in 1929 to the National Association of Deans and Advisers of Men (NADAM), and

finally in 1951 to NASPA (National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2008b),

the organization's mission has remained stable, "To provide professional development and

advocacy for student affairs educators and administrators who share the responsibility for a

campus-wide focus on the student experience" (National Association of Student Personnel

Administrators, 2008a).

With its initial name as the National Association of Appointment Secretaries (NAAS) in

1924, changing name in 1929 to the National Association of Placement and Personnel Officers,

and in 1931 The American College Personnel Association (ACPA), the organizations present day mission is, "to support and foster college student learning through the generation and dissemination of knowledge, which informs policies, practices, and programs, for student affairs professionals and the higher education community" (ACPA, 2008).

NASPA and ACPA have committees that contribute to the larger conversation about the role of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning within the profession. Each organization creates conference opportunities such as the annual International Assessment and Retention Conference (IARC) and other professional conferences. Each organization also creates and distributes materials.

> Colleges and universities are members of many associations, often voluntary in nature, that have powerful mimetic (and sometimes even coercive) influence: accrediting organizations that asses institutional conformance to educational and managerial standards, national associations that encourage certain institutional roles or activities, and associations of institutions in specific educational sectors whose members influence each other through personal contact and the development of formal policy positions. . .The support of such official and semi-official groups helps to legitimate the fad, thus making its adoption even more likely. (Birnbaum, 2000a, p. 148)

Practitioners and scholars internal and external to the field of higher education and student affairs are engaging about purposeful linkages and guiding research agendas based on field-specific need that is identified in sessions and roundtables at professional conferences such as the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), the American College Personnel Association (ACPA), the Association for Institutional Research Conference (AIR), and other professional conferences that host postsecondary institution professionals.

During the 49th Annual Forum of AIR in May 2009 over 400 sessions, organized by thematic track, provided participants learning opportunities through plenary, concurrent sessions, panels, table-topic discussions, exhibitor demonstrations, and poster displays (Association for Institutional Research, 2009). The decision to offer track two, *Assessing Student Learning & Program Outcomes,* and track four, *Informing Institutional Management & Planning,* suggested that conference planners and participants were concerned with the simultaneous linkage of assessment, student learning, and strategic planning. NASPA (2009a) is home to knowledge communities (KCs) which

> provide an opportunity for NASPA members to access information and resources in a specific subject matter that pertains to the student affairs profession and come together through common interests in ways that support the NASPA mission, vision, and goals. Knowledge Communities create and share knowledge through the delivery of educational research, programs, and products; through the use of technology; and by way of face-to-face meetings, workshops, and/or conferences. (p. 1)

NASPA's Assessment, Evaluation, and Research KC is similar to the conference activity of AIR, in that it provides information that conference participants are seeking to engage in the practice of strategic planning and assessment toward student learning. According to its mission, this KC

> encourages and supports student affairs professionals, faculty and graduate students at institutions across the county and throughout the world as they systematically assess learning, evaluate programs, and research theory and practice as it relates to our profession [student affairs]. By providing quality education and networking opportunities for those that engage in assessment, evaluation and research in student affairs, the

Knowledge Community strives to serve as a driving force in the movement towards

improved student learning. (NASPA, 2009b, section 1)

Deterrents to Effective Linkage

Individuals who work within student affairs divisions migrate from various professions.

Professionals enter from other professions or by having been educated as an involved

undergraduate or at one of the "more than fifty university programs [that] offer doctorates in

higher education and hundreds more [that] offer master's degrees" (Birnbaum, 2000a, p. 30)

(American College Personnel Association, 2010-2012). Student affairs professionals also vary in

their conceptualizations of assessment, strategic planning, student learning, and how the three are

applied in practice. ACPA houses a listing of preparation programs via ACPA's Commission for

Professional Preparation. It offers 134 master's degree programs and other Ph.D. programs

(American College Personnel Association, 2010-2012). The volumes of terms and definitions in

the literature to define student affairs-specific assessment, strategic planning, and student

learning also serve as a distraction to the field's scholars and practitioners attempting to

pontificate and practice appropriate linkages of assessment, strategic planning, and the

blueprinting of student learning (Welsh and Metcalf, 2003a). Welsh and Metcalf (2003a)

articulated that the:

> Review of standards and procedures of the six regional accrediting agencies in the United
>
> States reveals that each has specific accreditation criteria pertaining to institutional
>
> effectiveness, assessment, and program evaluation. The variation in terminology,
>
> however, makes a national study of administrative support for accreditation-driven
>
> institutional effectiveness initiatives very difficult. (p. 192)

The term "assessment" has several operational definitions that are used within the field of student affairs. Terenzini (1989) discerned, "many campuses have been engaged in 'assessment,' by one definition or another" (pp. 644-645). He also found that the assessment projects were "typically undertaken by individuals or by individual offices and committees and are not coordinated in any way. Nor are they part of any comprehensive, institutional plan for ongoing, systematic self-study and improvement" (p. 645).

Miller and Malandra (2006) explained that "there is no solid, comparative evidence of how much students learn in college, or whether they learn more at one school than another" (p. 4). They go on to indicate that two-thirds of universities in the US do not contribute to any type of assessment to guide educational programs and measure learning. Assessment activities have become more streamlined within student affairs since Terenzini's 1989 writing or the 2006 writing of Miller and Malandra. Challenge of definition variance abounds. How can activity with several definitions be coordinated with professional solidarity? How can individuals be institutionally and divisionally aligned with institutional mission, vision, and objectives if several operating definitions exist in the field's popular literature? Contemporary literature deduces that many student affairs professionals neglect the inclusion of assessment as it is to be practiced (Doyle, 2004; Henning & Elling, 2008; Wall, Kawakyu-O'Connor, Zelna, & Elling, 2009) and that many student affairs professionals lack proficiency to perform meaningful assessment – therefore guidance is needed (Cilente, Henning, Jackson-Skinner, Kennedy, & Sloane, 2007; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008). Sandeen and Barr (2006) articulated that

> as a professional field, student affairs has suffered from a fragmentation and proliferation of organizations, which stems in part from its inability to define itself in concrete and specific terms or to agree on a common definition of student personnel work. (p. 35)

Lack of solidarity within the field can result in disconnects, unfruitful activity, and ineffectual programs resulting in floundering student affairs divisions' with unnecessary human and fiscal resource waste. Schuh and Upcraft (2001) stated, "Typical student affairs professionals have little in their backgrounds or training that provides the knowledge and skills necessary to assess cost effectiveness, so decisions are often made on the basis of personal intuition, institutional realities or historical precedent" (p. 175).

Research indicates that there are other internal combatants to effective linkage of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning within student affairs. The field of student affairs is transient. High turnover rates for new and mid-level professionals contribute to an abrupt start and stop of projects and a deterioration of structure in student affairs that, if solid, could support a culture of evidence (Rosser & Javinar, 2003). Researchers Manning and Stage (2003) found that "institutional research constitutes a strategically better, more balanced, and less narrow resource for the institution when the…team reports to the president's office, but also directs its analytical service to the needs and priorities of the vice-presidents" (p. 203). With this model, the "centralized arrangement protects the institution better against staff turnover and the inefficiency of narrow specialization" (p. 2003). In a study about attrition in student affairs, researchers indicated, "student affairs leaders agrees [*sic*] that staff turnover is a problem within their units. This finding is similar to previous research within the student affairs area" (Rosser & Javinar, 2003, p. 823). The researchers go on to explain that "turnover among student affairs professionals continues to be relatively high compared to other units within higher education" (p. 825).

Ideas that illustrated the importance of linkages between assessment, strategic planning, and student learning in contemporary student affairs practice were presented in this chapter.

Discussion of the conceptual framework as drawn from the literature review will be analyzed below. Chapters that reiterate the purpose and methods exacted to understand the contemporary practice of how, if at all, deliberate linkages occur will follow the discussion.

Conceptual Framework of Study

The conceptual framework and methodology of this study is derived from theorists of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning outlined throughout the literature review and the dissertation work of three scholars. Aloi (2004) presented case study research wherein she constructed a conceptual model that addressed the challenge of assessment data use and strategic planning at an institutional level. The attention of Aloi's model was directed toward the institutional level. Aloi's work acknowledged student affairs as part of the whole institution but did not examine student affairs as an independent unit. According to the abstract, Aloi's study

> was based on the philosophical premise that the mission of an institution of higher
> education should be focused on student-learning outcomes, and all strategic decisions
> need to be made in accordance with what has been proven to enhance student learning.
> Because the assessment process results in data that can determine what conditions
> positively affect student learning, these data should be used to make the strategic
> decisions that affect the core student-learning mission of the institution. (p. ii)

This study was based on a slightly similar premise: that the mission of students affairs is focused on student-learning outcomes and that all strategic decisions within student affairs divisions need to be made in accordance with what student affairs literature and practice has demonstrated toward improved student learning. The role played by student affairs in assessment data use, strategic planning and student learning will be highlighted by examining these concepts specifically through the literary lenses of student affairs.

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The case study method was used to better understand how student affairs professionals operate, if at all, in a cyclical process of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning resultant of the purposive work of student affairs professionals. Green (2006) also utilized case study research. The purpose of the study was

> to examine high quality assessment practices of student affairs divisions at three different research institutions in order to advance the value, usefulness, and understanding of learning outcomes assessment within the student affairs profession, so more student affairs divisions may begin assessing the co-curricular. (p. 2)

This study is analogous to Green's study in that it uses case study methodology, integrates the examination of assessment practices of student affairs divisions, and acknowledges the role of strategic planning. Cubarrubia's (2009) dissertation, "sought to determine the influence of external standards of institutional effectiveness on program assessment in student affairs" (p. vi). This study addressed external influences on assessment, strategic planning, student learning, and the linkages between them. Internal influences and intentional linkages were also investigated.

A broad theoretical framework focusing on assessment, strategic planning and student learning was utilized to answer the study's problem statement. The framework displayed in Figure 8 is built on the interpretations outlined throughout the literature review. This framework will serve as the guiding conceptual framework until data have been analyzed and more is known about the phenomena.

> Frames of reference are an essential tool for managing meaning. And when you can manage meaning you can get agreement on common destinations and how each person may uniquely contribute to the accomplishment of that shared destination: to determine the

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meaning of a subject, event, or new reality is to make sense of it; to control this frame of an

event or trend is to choose one particular meaning (or set of meanings) over another. When

we share our perceptions and mental models with others, we manage meaning. We assert

that our interpretations should be taken as a better alternative to other possible

interpretations. (Kaufman et al., 2003, p. 7)

The conceptual framework is based on the aforementioned review of literature and on

merging the individual models of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning outcomes.

Prominent literature mentioned throughout the literature review grounds the framework upon

divisional mission and linkages that can be capitalized upon if utilized. The framework also

brings to bear literature that suggests, whether internally or externally imposed, assessment and

strategic planning processes should be linked, and strategic decisions should ultimately made to

increase student learning (Blimling, 2005; Hamrick et al. 2002; Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). This

conceptual framework (Figure 8) is developed from the work of authors outlined in the literature

review as they examined ways of understanding institutional and divisional strategic planning

and assessment.

Each area of the conceptual framework contributes rationale stemming directly from

what literature suggests as common practice. The student affairs mission should support and

complement the institutional mission (Sandeen et al., 1987; Sandeen & Barr, 2006). The direct

measures of assessment should collect and reveal aggregate data as opposed to individual forms

of assessment, and strategic planning should stem from multiple and varied sources (Keeling et

al., 2008, Huba & Freed, 2000). Authors also suggest that a committee or champion be named to

guide the work of divisional strategic planning and assessment with regularity and enthusiasm

(Committee on Professional Competencies, 2007, Kuh, 1996). The committee or champion will

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then lead the division in process creation, implementation, and data dissemination to

stakeholders so that decisions may be made (Middaugh, 2010).

Divisional Mission Statement
(Flows from Institutional Mission/Culture of Accountability)
☐
Divisional Objectives
☐
Assessment (Multiple Measures, Aggregate Data)☐☐ Strategic Planning interconnected/cyclic
activity)
☐   ☐
People (champion, committee)   ☐☐   People (champion, committee)
☐   ☐
Process   Process
☐   ☐
Timeline   Timeline
☐   ☐
Data   Data
☐   ☐
Strategic Decision Making (Creating Student Learning)
☐
Implementation
☐☐
Evaluation (how well were student learning outcomes achieved)
☐
Return to Divisional Mission Statement, Closing Loop of Cyclic Process

Figure 8. Conceptual Framework. (adapted, in part, from "Conceptual Framework," by Aloi, S.
L., 2004).

Subsequent to the implementation of those decisions and the proper evaluation (the

process which determines how well something was done) thereof, practitioners can clearly see

what is proven to increase student learning and may continue to create and improve conditions in

a cyclical manner (Cistone & Bashford, 2002). Examination of other connectivity in the

conceptual framework is reserved for post data analysis. Table 10 illustrates how the major

literature review headings appeared in the literature review and relate to the study's research

questions, and consequently, the conceptual framework.

Table 10

Theoretical Assumptions, Literature Review Headings and Relevancy to Major Research Questions

Assumptions	Literature review headings and subheadings & relevancy to the study's major research questions	Major research questions (RQ's):
(a) the mission of a student affairs division should be based on student learning (b) all strategic decisions within the division should be made in accordance with what has been proven to enhance student learning (c) a deliberate, cyclical process, including assessment, strategic planning, and student learning, prevents silo work and is a best practice toward improving student-learning opportunities; (d) student affairs divisions implement or revisit a form of assessment and/or strategic planning for each area in the division on at least a periodic or annual basis.	<u>Accountability</u> History of accountability in student affairs (RQ3, RQ4, RQ5) Legacy (RQ1) Benefits (RQ2) Reactionary accountability (RQ4, RQ5) Role of accreditation (RQ4) <u>Student Affairs Related Assessment</u> History of Student affairs assessment (RQ1, RQ4, RQ5) Framework of Student affairs assessment (RQ 3, RQ4, RQ5) Planning tasks (RQ1, RQ3, RQ5) Relationship to mission (RQ 1) Relationship to student learning outcomes (RQ1) Assessment planning & major goals of assessment (RQ1, RQ3, RQ5) Student learning assessment or program assessment (RQ1) Participants (RQ4) Measurement tools (RQ1, RQ5) Data analysis and dissemination (RQ1, RQ5) Uses of assessment data (RQ1) Varied means to practice (RQ1, RQ3) Assessment implementation (RQ1, RQ4) Who is responsible? (RQ1, RQ4) <u>Strategic planning in student affairs</u> History of Student affairs strategic planning (RQ3) Framework of Student affairs strategic planning (Planning Models) (RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5) Relationship to mission (RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5) Relationship to student learning outcomes (RQ2, RQ3, RQ5) Major goals and purposes of strategic planning (RQ2, RQ4) Strategic planning implementation and tasks (RQ4, RQ5) Strategic planning analysis and dissemination (RQ4) Uses of strategic planning (RQ5) Fiscal underpinning (RQ3, RQ4, RQ5) Who is responsible (RQ4) <u>Link between student affairs assessment, strategic planning, and student learning</u>	1. How are divisional assessment processes linked to student learning? 2. How are divisional strategic plan(s) linked to student learning? 3. How do student affairs divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment? 4. Who is involved in divisions' assessment and/or strategic planning, and what are the major responsibilities of these individuals? 5. What are common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning?

Table 10. *Theoretical Assumptions, Literature Review Headings and Relevancy to Major Research Questions (continued)*

Assumptions	Literature review headings and subheadings & relevancy to the study's major research questions	Major research questions (RQ's):
	Background and historical context (RQ4, RQ5)	
	Student affairs linkage models (RQ4, RQ5)	
	Relationship to mission (RQ3, RQ5)	
	Major goals of linking assessment, strategic planning, and student learning (RQ3, RQ4, RQ5)	
	Who is responsible (RQ4)	
	Role of professional associations (RQ2, RQ3, RQ4, RQ5)	
	Deterrents to effective linkage (RQ4)	

In order to address the research questions the interview protocol questions are also conceptually assembled in Appendix B to complement a division's match with the criteria for effective assessment, strategic planning, and the design of student learning opportunities. Refer to chapter three for an in depth discussion on instrumentation. Questions that appear on the interview protocol demonstrate their association to answering each research question, as described by Table 11. According to the table, Research Question (RQ) 1 addresses *Interview Protocol* items (IP) numbers two, three, four, five, and seven (and others) and the *Document Content Analysis Protocol* (DP) items associated with research question one are one, two, three, four, and fourteen, etc.

Table 11

Interview (IP) and Document (DP) Protocol Aligned With Research Questions

Research Question	(IP) Assessment Questions	(IP) Strategic Planning Questions	(IP) Linkage Questions	(IP) Student Learning Questions	**(DP) Document Analysis Protocol**
RQ1. How are divisional assessment processes linked to student learning?	2, 3, 4b, 5, 5b, 7, 8, 9, 11, 13	2, 5, 8, 9	2, 5, 8, 9, 11, 13	7, 8, 10, 11, 13	1, 2, 3, 4, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18, 28
RQ2. How are divisional strategic plan(s) linked to student learning?	2, 5, 8, 9	2, 4, 4a, 5, 5a, 6, 8, 9, 10, 12, 12a	2, 5, 6, 8, 9, 10		5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23
RQ3. How do student affairs divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment?	2, 3, 4b, 5, 5b, 8, 13, 13a	2, 4, 4a, 5, 5a, 8, 12, 12a	2, 5, 8	1	10, 11, 12, 13, 24, 25, 26, 27, 29,30
RQ4. Who is involved in divisions' assessment and/or strategic planning, and what are the major responsibilities of these individuals?	1, 2, 3, 5b, 13	1, 2, 4, 5a, 12	1, 2, 3		5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23
RQ5. What are common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning?	2, 3, 4b, 5b, 9, 11, 13, 13a	2, 4, 4a, 5a, 10, 12, 12a	2, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11		30, 31, 32, 33

CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

The intent of this study was to determine the extent to which student affairs assessment data are utilized in strategic planning of student learning at six land-grant, *CampusLabs* institutions. Using a qualitative method, multiple site case study methodology, this study examined six case institutions wherein student affairs professionals deliberately connect assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. Including the case institution engaged for the pilot study, discussion of each case institution will utilize pseudonyms. See Table 12 for a list of institutions profiled in this study. Each institution has a particular identity and differing methods of approaching strategic planning and assessment. Due to six different accrediting regions promulgating differing standards among its member institutions, case study qualitative research was the most appropriate method to address the study's purpose, its major research questions, and align the conceptual framework, research design and method.

Yin asserted that five components must be included in the design: a study's questions; its propositions, if any; its unit(s) of analysis; the logic linking the data to propositions; and the criteria for interpreting findings (2003). To support this method selection, this chapter will address elements presented by Yin and offer details and rationale for the logistics selected by the researcher, site selection, population, sampling procedure, data-collection techniques, and data-analysis methods. Required cover letters, content, and interview and document protocols are contained within the appendices.

Research Questions

The research questions were constructed from the literature review in order to address student affairs assessment, strategic planning, student learning, and linkages among the three as well as to examine how the field parcels and combines these areas. These questions specifically

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addressed the conceptual framework and inquired as to the purposeful linking occurrences and

activity of student affairs assessment, strategic planning, student learning, and staff responsible

for linkages. This study explored five research questions:

Table 12

Interview Respondent Characteristics

Institution & Site Visit Date	Geographic Location/Accrediting Region	Type	Carnegie Classification	Approximate Enrollment (Total Students) Spring 2013
Middle States University (MSU) 1/2012 2/2012	Central United States	- *4-year* - *Public* - *Land-Grant*	Very high research activity	37,000
New England University (NEU) 12/2011 1/2012	Northeast United States	- *4-year* - *Public* - *Land-Grant*	Very high research activity	*30,256*
North Central University (NCU) 1/2012 2/2012	North central United States	- *4-year* - *Public* - *Land-Grant*	Very high research activity	*29,500*
Northwest Commission University (NWCU) 3/2012	Northwest region of the United States	- *4-year* - *Public* - *Land-Grant*	Very high research activity	26,393
Southern University (SU) 1/2012 2/2012 3/2012	Southern region of the United States	- *4-year* - *Public* - *Land-Grant*	Very high research activity	50,691
Western University (WU) 9/2012 12/2012	Western region of the United States	- *4-year* - *Public* - *Land-Grant*	Very high research activity	29,052

1. How are divisional assessment processes linked to student learning?

2. How are divisional strategic plan(s) linked to student learning?

3. How do student affairs divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment?

4. Who is involved in divisions' assessment and/or strategic planning, and what are the major responsibilities of these individuals?

5. What are common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning?

Qualitative Research Design

This study used a qualitative research design for data collection with case study methodology. A qualitative case study method was chosen because qualitative methods are multifaceted with various approaches (Miles & Huberman, 1994). Qualitative design offers a multiplicity of methods to engage respondents who have specific perceptions of assessment and strategic planning processes at their institutions. Given that the purpose of this study was to determine the extent to which student affairs assessment data are utilized in strategic planning of student learning at six land-grant, *CampusLabs* institutions, a qualitative research design utilizing multiple site case study was necessary. The method drew upon interviews from two to five field-specific practitioners in six different accrediting regions. Several authors have articulated the nature of a qualitative research design adopted for this study.

- Qualitative researchers do not accept phenomena as uniform; rather that meaning is situated in a specific perspective.

- Qualitative researchers often refrain from stating a hypothesis before collecting data so that problems and methods evolve as understanding deepens.

- The quantity of participants tends to be small, in part, due to the intensive data collection and analysis methods necessary to complete the study.

- Literature review plays a minor role

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- Data are collected using general, emerging questions to permit the participant to generate unbiased responses

- Data analysis involves coding and developing a large thematic meaning in the findings.

- Reporting qualitative research is subjective (reflexive) (Creswell, 2005; Gay, Mills, Airasian, 2006a).

Multiple Site Case Study

Case study research design utilizing multiple case studies was necessary to gain and analyze data of individual divisional practice and between-case linkages. This method "involves collecting and analyzing data from several cases…" (p. 40) and was essential to "strengthen the precision, the validity, and the stability of the findings" (Miles & Huberman, 1994, p. 29). Case study research design utilizing multiple site case studies helped in understanding common practices of cyclically integrating assessment, strategic planning, and student learning.

The gap in student affairs-specific literature necessitated case study research by exploring in-depth knowledge of the professions' connections among and between assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. Also known as collective case studies or comparative case studies, multiple cases are recount and compare while providing understanding (Creswell, 1994, 2005; Merriam, 2001). Multiple site case studies were used of six land-grant institutions that are affiliated with *CampusLabs*. This multiple site case study relied on triangulation of data collected through the initial delineation of institutions using the "criteria to select case study institutions" analysis process (see Site Selection section), by semi-structured, Skype-based, question-and-answer interviews, by analyzing documents, and theme emergence from the reviewed interviews and instruments. Questions were pre-determined and allowed for probing from the researcher

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and also allowed other questions to accompany the protocol that stemmed from information provided by previous respondents or feedback from the respondents during interviews. Denzin and Lincoln (2005) stated:

> Qualitative research is a situated activity that locates the observer in the world. Qualitative research consists of a set of interpretive, material practices that makes the world visible. These practices transform the world. They turn the world into a series of representations including field notes, interviews, conversations, photographs, recordings and memos to the self. (p. 3)

According to Stake (1995) "A case constitutes a "specific, a complex, functioning thing" (1995, p. 2). He further asserted, "The case is an integrated system. The parts do not have to be working well, the purposes may be irrational, but it is a system. Thus people and programs clearly are prospective cases" (p. 2). The case study approach allowed for understanding of interrelated events "when a "how" or "why" question is being asked about a contemporary set of events, over which the investigator has no control" (Yin, 2003, p. 9). Limited empirical research exists that addresses a specific cyclic process of assessment (of student learning), strategic planning of student learning (from the assessment data), student learning, and linkage of the three. Student affairs-specific data were collected and analyzed from three to five practitioners at six different institutions to create empirical knowledge.

Multiple case study design uses methodology that is appropriate for this study because the method allows phenomenological patterns to emerge from case to case (Yin, 2009). Identifying phenomenological patterns were important to this study because case-to-case patterns determined the extent to which student affairs assessment data were utilized in strategic planning of student learning. Also "multiple-case designs have distinct advantages and disadvantages in

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comparison to single-case designs. The evidence from multiple cases is often considered more compelling, and the overall study is therefore regarded as being more robust" (Yin, 2009, p. 53). Case study research delineates the characteristics of a particular entity, phenomenon, or person (Gay et al., 2006b, p. 401). Case study research is also "an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon such as a program, an institution, a person, a process, or a social unit (Merriam, 2009, p. x).

The inclusion criteria for case institutions were based upon what student affairs-specific literature has determined as a high-quality division in the areas of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. Yin (2009) suggested, "Prior to collecting the screening data, you should have defined a set of operational criteria whereby candidates will be deemed qualified to serve as cases" (p. 91). To ascertain high-quality divisions, publicly available documents, reports, websites, and other media relating to assessment, strategic planning, and student learning were reviewed. The review processes verified if the pre-determined criteria emerging from the literature review (see Appendix A. for a matrix of the criteria) strongly matched documents under review. High-quality institutions were validated during Skype-based interviews. Criteria to determine high-quality institutions addressed the study's conceptual framework, which included assessment, strategic planning, student learning and the connections between the three.

Population and Sample

Criterion-based sampling of six land-grant *CampusLabs* sites was used. CampusLabs institutions were considered for study inclusion due to the company's commodification strategy to market data collection, disclosure, organization, and institutional integration to student affairs professionals. Sites that had student affairs divisions with investment and commitment to assessment were identified within categories representative of the six geographical regions that

correspond with the six regional accrediting agencies in the United States because each region promulgates standards for the student affairs field. Maximum variation sampling was employed to select the samples of student affairs professionals within each case, based on the availability and willingness of each respondent to contribute to the study. Maximum variation sampling, also referred to as purposeful sampling, "is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned" (Merriam, 1998, p. 61). Maximum variation sampling widened the realm of participants with respect to area, experience, and so on. Therefore, participants were diverse in hopes of learning the most about the phenomenon. Some amount of convenience sampling was necessary based on access to *Skype*, site location, time, institutional cooperation, availability of interview subjects, and unforeseen constraints.

Respondents

At least two practitioners who were institutionally accountable in some form to divisional assessment, strategic planning and assessment were interviewed from institutions representative of one of the six regional accrediting agencies throughout six U.S. geographical regions. Division liaisons at each case institution provided access to two to five participants. Two or more respondents were contacted to schedule a Skype-based interview. As participants were unavailable, one more participant was contacted to meet study requirements. At least two practitioners from each accrediting region and institution responded fully by participating in the study. Eligible institutions were uncovered by use of the instruments *Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions* (See Appendix A.). The *Document Content Analysis Protocol* (See Appendix C.) was used to determine which submitted and publically available documents from case institutions to include in the study.

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Demographic Data

Two to five student affairs practitioners from six different geographical regions that correspond with the six regional accrediting agencies in the United States were chosen from case institutions wherein student affairs professionals were found to deliberately connect assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. Each practitioner interviewed was from a *CampusLabs-*affiliate land-grant university that revealed evidence of strong linkages of assessment, student learning, and strategic planning within the institution's student affairs division. Explained below are results of demographic data collected during document review and semi-structured interviews with 17 participants. Evidence of linkages was uncovered by use of the instruments *Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions* (See Appendix A.) and *Document Content Analysis Protocol* (See Appendix C.).

Study Participants

Two to five participants (referred to herein by pseudonyms) from each of the six case institutions were interviewed via Skype for approximately one hour. Each participant was recommended by a primary person within student affairs who was confirmed at each institution to serve as liaison for the study process. Liaisons were asked to provide contact information for 3-5 student affairs personnel in the student affairs division who participate in key aspects of the strategic planning and assessment processes for the division. Individuals within the following categories were recruited for interviews at each case institution: (a) assessment director, (b) director of institutional research, (c) vice president or chancellor of student affairs, (d) deans of student life, (e) strategic planning committee members, and (f) student affairs personnel and key administrators.

Site Selection

Six *CampusLabs*-affiliate land-grant universities (RU/VH: Research Universities – very high research activity and RU/H: Research Universities - high research activity) and DRU: Doctoral Research universities), as classified by The Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education (2013), were chosen using a protocol called the *Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions* (See Appendix A). that revealed evidence of strong linkages of assessment, student learning, and strategic planning within the institution's student affairs division. The criteria in Appendix A was categorized toward understanding the extent to which each site exhibited characteristics consistent with student affairs literature recommendations. The criteria in Appendix A. rest upon the key literature and the conceptual framework outlined in Chapter two.

The six institutions chosen were representative of the six geographical regions that correspond with the six regional accrediting agencies: the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (Middle States), New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (North Central), Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC), because "the more cases included in the study, and the greater variation across the cases, the more compelling an interpretation is likely to be" (Merriam, 1998, p. 40). However, Patton (2002) cautioned,

> For small samples, a great deal of heterogeneity can be a problem because individual cases are so different from each other. The maximum variation sampling strategy turns that apparent weakness into a strength by applying the following logic: Any common patterns that emerge from great variation are of particular interest and value in capturing the core experiences and central, shared dimensions of a setting or phenomenon. (p. 235)

For this study of best practices in cyclically addressing assessment and strategic planning toward impact on student learning, maximum variation sampling (a type of purposive sampling), convenience, and theoretical sampling were used in selecting documents for analysis and the respondents at each site. This study utilized maximum variation sampling at six *CampusLabs* land-grant institutions. There were 3-5 respondents interviewed at each institution. As this small sample of extremes was chosen, the researcher planned that the data collection and analysis processes would result in "two kinds of findings: (1) high-quality, detailed descriptions of each case, which are useful for documenting uniquenesses [sic], and (2) important shared patterns that cut across cases and derive their significance from having emerged out of heterogeneity" (Patton, 2002, p. 235). Maximum variation sampling "aims at capturing and describing the central themes that cut across a great deal of variation" (Patton, 2002, pp. 234-235) and capturing a spectrum of extremes in how individuals experience the phenomenon. The enterprise surrounding assessment, strategic planning, and student learning comprises a wide array of professionals, making maximum variation sampling ideal for this study.

Affiliate sites were selected for this study by using literature review-based criteria to establish the quality of a division's strategic plan, assessment process, and impact on student learning, as well as the extent of successful integration of the three (See Appendix A). The instrument, titled *Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions*, included a point-system criterion scheme to assist in the delineation of common-practice institutions. As it will appear on Appendix A, *Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions*, the pre-determined criterion that arose from the literature and conceptual framework was compared to publically available documents of an institution. High-quality divisions were further determined by meeting 90% of the criteria and by the researcher's review of internet web pages and other publicly-available data and

documents related to the division's strategic plan, assessment process, and student learning activity. Matching the public data with pre-determined criteria and selecting divisions with the strongest link between data and criteria further determined such divisions.

Criteria used to review the assessment, strategic planning, student learning activity, and linkages among the three at each prospective site were developed based on the literature review. Utilizing criteria assisted the researcher in selecting high-quality case studies (Merriam, 1998) that flow from the best and/or common practice found in the literature. Criteria addressed issues of student affairs assessment, strategic planning, student learning, staff responsible for linkages, and the conceptual framework. Validation of the institution's match to the criteria was solidified during document review and Skype-based interviews.

The criteria are divided into four sections and appear in Appendix A.

1. Accrediting Body

2. Student affairs assessment structure:

   - Identified a director/coordinator/facilitator of assessment efforts?

   - Assessment committee/council?

3. Comprehensive and/or unit level student affairs assessment plans and reports demonstrate:

   - Reporting procedures in place to link assessment and strategic planning?

   - Assessment results clearly tied with strategic planning?

   - Use of multiple methods to assess learning outcomes?

4. Institutional criteria:

   - Land-Grant Institution?

   - *CampusLabs* Participating Institution?

Respondent Selection

The communication strategy employed a primary person within student affairs who was confirmed at each case institution to serve as liaison for the study process. This liaison was asked to provide contact information for 3-5 student affairs personnel in the student affairs division who participate in key aspects of the strategic planning and assessment processes for the division. The liason was asked to send the researchers contact information to potential respondents and to give respondents contact information to the researcher. Maximum variation sampling was then utilized to select personnel who were able to provide the most comprehensive information regarding linkages among assessment, strategic planning and student learning within the institution's student affairs division because student affairs personnel are employed in a "wide range of functional areas" (Dungy, 2003, p. 339). Approximately 2-5 individuals at each site were scheduled for interviews toward completing a Skype-based interview. Individuals within the following categories were recruited for interviews at each site: (a) assessment director, (b) director of institutional research, (c) vice president or chancellor of student affairs, (d) deans of student life, (e) strategic planning committee members, and (f) student affairs personnel and key administrators. Note taking and a computer-based recording were taken during the interviews. Immediately following the interview, the researcher reviewed and expanded the notes based on memory.

Institutional Permissions and Human Subjects Considerations

In order to proceed in communicating with a case institution, institutional acceptance of the study was required and granted on four different levels: from the student affairs administration at the case institution, from the Institutional Review Board (IRB) department at the case institution, from the individual subjects at each site, and from North Dakota State

University's (NDSU) IRB department. Work did not proceed until approvals to begin were granted. After the IRB process was followed at NDSU and permissions granted, appropriate processes were followed for the case institutions as determined by the case institution. Subsequent to approval from the case institution, such documentation was submited to NDSU's IRB board. With approval granted from each institution, the student affairs division liaisons at each institution were asked for permission and were also asked to supply a list of potential interview respondents, from which was developed a maximum variation purposive sample (see Appendix F). The divisional liaison then contacted each respondent, and extended invitation for their participation in the study. After receiving notice that the invitation has been extended, each potential interview respondent was contacted to determine his or her assent and availability to participate (Appendix G). Upon receiving the agreeance, Skype-based interviews were scheduled.

Informed Consent, Interview Notification, and Reminders

Once the institutional liaison had supplied a list of potential respondents, an email to request individual subject participation (Appendix G) was sent to each individual. A single reminder email (Appendix H) was sent to non-respondents one week after the initial contact. One week after the reminder email was sent, a final reminder email (Appendix I) was sent to non-respondents. If neither appeal was adhered to by a respondent, the liaison was again approached for the contact information of more possible respondents, as needed. Prior to the interview, each participating respondent received an interview protocol by email that includes the informed consent clause which outlined "the risks and benefits of participation, the activities that constitute participation, the terms of their participation, and their rights as research subjects" (Fink, 2003, p. 93). The informed consent document included notice of permission from the

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NDSU Institutional Review Board (IRB) and his/her own institution's approval of the study. Each interview protocol that included the informed consent clause had the same text and included customized wording for the institution where the interview was being conducted. Please see Appendix B. for the interview protocol with the informed consent clause.

Instrumentation

Triangulazation strategies to insure validity were used, such as pilot testing, peer debriefing, engaging the researchers dissertation committee and field-specific experts for research question and interview protocol validation; member checking, asking respondents to review and respond to their transcribed interview for accuracy; and inter-rater reliability to gauge coding consistency. Researcher identity memo, termed by Maxwell (2005), identifies the researcher as the primary instrument. A *Researcher as Primary Instrument Statement* (see Appendix K) was composed which expressed professional and lived experience that led to the pursuance of the research topic. According to Maxwell, the memo will help the researcher see their "goals, experiences, asumptions, feelings, and values as they relate" (p. 29) to the research. The statement illustrates any significance or bias that may impact the design, method, and analysis and offers the reader insight into the study's findings based on the researcher as instrument. Miles and Huberman (1994) outlined characteristics of qualitative researcher-as-instrument, they include:

- Some familiarity with the phenomenon and the setting under study

- Strong conceptual interests

- A multidisciplinary approach, as opposed to a narrow grounding or focus in asingle discipline

- Good "investigative" skills, including doggedness, the ability to draw people out, and the ability to war odd premature closure (p. 38)

Participants involved in divisional strategic planning and assessment processes were interviewed to obtain information that could not be directly observed and related to student learning. The discussions were guided by predetermined questions from the interview protocol that were based on the literature review, but did allow for probing from the researcher and other questions that stemmed from information provided by previous respondents or feedback from the respondent during the interview. Terms as defined in the study were provided to respondents during the interview only if clarification was requested so that each respondent answered questions based on their own understanding or had the same understanding of terms as used by the researcher.

Instruments in Appendices A through C were adapted from other studies for use in this study. The headings of instruments in the appendices reflect studies from which adaptation was made. The interview protocol has been developed for use during the interviews and is included within the appendix section (Appendix B). The interview protocol addresses the division's strategic planning, its assessment process, student learning, and the linkages among them. Representative segments and example questions included

1. Assessment Questions
   - What are the major goals of your division's assessment program?
   - Tell me about how assessment data is shared or communicated on campus?

2. Strategic Planning Questions
   - How does the strategic planning process operate in your division?
   - Who is involved in the division's strategic planning process?

3. Student Learning Question

   - Please describe examples of how divisional assessment leads to student learning?

   - Please describe examples of how divisional strategic planning leads to student

   - learning?

4. Linkage Questions

   - According to prominent student affairs literature, student affairs divisions should

     have certain criteria that links student learning to assessment and strategic

     planning. I am curious to hear how the division of student affairs at [institution]

     intentionally links assessment, strategic planning and student learning? Can you

     tell me more about that?

   - Please explain how divisional strategic planning goals improve student learning?

Validity and Reliability

Validity refers to the "degree to which a survey instrument assesses what it purports to measure" (Fink, 2003, p. 165). Triangulation of data-collection strategies and data sources was used to ensure the validity of the research and to gain a more complete picture of the problem under study. This was completed to minimize the threat of subjectivity, establish relationship from one data source to another, and to increase the dependability (consistency) and confirmability (neutrality) of the study.

> [It]. . . is to be expected. . . Even if an event is not controversial, it will have been seen
> and remembered from different angles of view by different observers . . . As the lion in
> Aesop said to the Man, "There are many statues of men slaying lions, but if only the lions
> were sculptors there might be a different set of statues." (Miles & Huberman, 1994,
> p. 19)

The method of triangulation of multiple data sources across time, space, and persons was used to deepen the study's level of reliability. The study employed inter-rater reliability wherein two other individuals coded the study's data to minimize the threat of subjectivity and offer consistency among findings. Member checking (Creswell, 2005) or cross-checking information, returning transcripts to respondents to check the accounts' accuracy, was also utilized.

The researcher also employed credibility (truth value) as a major defense to subjectivity. Credibility is the extent to which a study works "to communicate the various constructions of reality in a setting back to the persons who hold them in a form that will be affirmed by them" (Erlandson, Harris, Skipper & Allen, 1993, p. 40). In addition to having two other persons code for confirmability in data analysis, the researcher used the following strategies (adapted from Guba's discussion) to avoid subjectivity and to solidify the credibility of the study (Gay et al., 2006b, p. 404).

- Complete prolonged participation at the study site to overcome data distortions

- Complete persistent observation

- Complete peer debriefing

- Collect documents and other artifact data items

- Complete participant cross-checks for accuracy of data before the final draft

- Establish corroboration and coherence to ensure no contradictions

Maxwell (1992) described four types of validity that relate to qualitative research: descriptive, interpretive, theoretical, and evaluative validity. Descriptive validity ensures the factual accuracy of the account. Interpretive validity entails accurately interpreting meanings and participant behaviors. Theoretical validity refers to the researcher's ability to explain the phenomenon in relation to a theory. Evaluative validity is the "researcher's ability to report the

research objectively and in an unbiased way" (p. 403). This research study will employ each of the four types as outlined by Maxwell. A major type of validity, construct validity, supports all other types of validity (Messick, 1989) and refers to "congruence between the meaning of the underlying construct and the items on the test or survey" (Palomba & Banta, 1999, p. 91). This research study will relate the items on the interview protocol to the literature review in an effort to substantiate item construct validity.

Reliability refers to the degree to which a survey instrument "yields consistent scores over time" (Fink, 2003, p. 163). To increase reliability, data will be collected and managed uniformly. The same interview protocol will be used with each respondent and an instrument validation process will be conducted to clarify or improve the study's details.

<div align="center">

Data Collection

</div>

Case institutions were chosen by using the instrument *Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions* (See Appendix A). According to Gay et al. (2006b), interviewing is the "second major form of data collection. . . [that] can gather in-depth data, [and] can examine attitudes, interests, feelings, concerns, and values" (p. 418). Respondents who are institutionally accountable in some form to assessment, strategic planning, or student learning processes were interviewed to gain in-depth data to examine their attitudes, interests, feelings, concerns, and values relating to the problem at hand. The researcher conducted semi-structured interviews (Berg, 2007). Referred to as "as a conversation with a purpose" (p. 89), Berg proposed that semi-standardized interviews have several questions to be used to provide flexible guidance to the researcher.

Documents

This study relied on the analysis of documents gained directly from respondents, public domain publications internal and external to the institution, and online sources. Data was gleaned

from written and visual data sources that contribute to understanding the problem. To determine

if documents address assessment, strategic planning, and assessment within the division, each

applicable document received was reviewed using the Document Content Analysis Protocol

(Appendix C.) to determine themes. According to Merriam (2001), "Documents of all types can

help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to

the research question" (p. 133). Patton (2002) articulated that, "document analysis includes

studying excerpts, quotations, or entire passages from organizational, clinical, or program

records; memoranda and correspondence; official publications and reports; personal diaries; and

open-ended written responses to questionnaires and surveys" (p. 4). There are weakness to these

types of methods of data collection and analysis. "Documents are 'social facts' in that they are

produced, shared and used in socially organized ways. They are not, however, transparent

representations of organizational routines, decision-making processes or professional diagnoses"

(Atkinson & Coffey, 2004, p. 58). Several scholars, including student affairs specific scholars

such as Manning and Stage (2003) validate that within qualitative study, reality is socially

constructed. To address this possible weakness, the institution was validated for use in the study

by conducting Skype-based interviews in addition to document analysis.

In addition to the campus newspaper, webpages, internal communication, minutes,

agendas, and documents that participants share, other examples of documents that were collected

included

- Student Affairs Strategic Plan

- Student Affairs Assessment Plan(s)

- Student Affairs Assessment Reports

- Council Advancement Standards (CAS) artifacts

- Student Affairs Organizational Chart

- Student Affairs Strategic Planning Committee listing

- Student Affairs Assessment Committee membership listing, meeting agendas, and minutes

- Organizational Charts for Assessment Program, and Institutional Research Office

- Other pertinent assessment, strategic planning, or student-learning correspondence

Interviews

Skype-based interviews were audio recorded directly to a password-protected computer. Digital sound recordings using Macintosh programs called Garageband and iTunes were used. As a backup to the audio recording on Garageband, a digital recorder was utilized. There is a paucity of literature that addresses the advantages and disadvantages of interviewing via Skype. According to Reigeluth and Frick (1999) more research is needed to address the use of new technologies in educational design. The inability to record the physical likeness of respondents via web camera and the inability to read face-to-face and other interpersonal skills as cues during the interview process was a restriction. An advantage of using Skype-based interviews is its cost effective nature. The semi-structured, question-and-answer interviews performed by Skype was recorded directly to Garageband and the Garageband file was transferred to an Apple iTunes file, and then altered into an mp3 file so that it could be emailed to a transcriptionist who typed the Skype-based interview text and emailed back the Microsoft word file of verbatim transcripts for accuracy and analysis. Transcriptions were read and checked against audio files for themes and accuracy prior to the typed and audio file being sent to respondents to check for transcription accuracy and themes that arose from the transcription coding process.

Data Analysis

Coding is a "process of categorically marking units of text with codes or labels as a way to indicate patterns and meaning in data" that was used by a data analysis team to synthesize data. The team received training on coding procedures prior to data analysis. Coding procedures (Strauss & Corbin, 1990) guided the analysis to develop informed interpretations of the data. Data analysis succeeded in order from open, axial, to selective coding. Open coding, which involves "breaking down, examining, comparing, conceptualizing, and categorizing data" (Strauss & Corbin, 1990, p. 61) was conducted on the data by recording common themes and generating categories that aligned with the conceptual framework derived from the literature review. Initial striation of categorical data was for convenience of analysis. Interviews were clustered into one of the six geographical regions which correspond with one of the six regional accrediting agencies: the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (Middle States), New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC), North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (North Central), Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), and Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Each cluster of respondents at a given institution was then labeled according to an acronym (in parenthesis next to each accrediting body outlined in the above sentences). Separating the clustered sample into accrediting regions allowed for the within case deduction of differences and similarities, as they may exist by regional accrediting agency.

The first step to coding was to "first analyze each case separately and then conduct a cross-case analysis to identify common and different themes among all of the cases" (Creswell, 2005, p. 452). The next steps were to interpret the document and interview data, categorize the

findings, and develop themes from those findings, while using quotes from respondents to reveal major themes.

Axial coding was used to compare, contrast, and observe possible relationships between, within, and among the interviews; document analysis; and emergent themes. Lastly, selective coding was conducted to develop core categories of assertions and examine if those assertions have direct bearing on the phenomenon under study. Two coders were trained to analyze the data in order of open, axial, and selective coding procedures. In cooperation with the researcher, coders read each transcript, chose categories, themes, and assertions as pertaining to the verbatim words of interview respondents. Theoretical sampling, constant comparison and simultaneous collection, was utilized in a non-linear process that included data collection, interpretation, and analysis of interview audio and text, field notes, respondent feedback, and document contents.

> The iterative process of qualitative study design means that samples are usually theory driven to a greater or lesser extent. Theoretical sampling necessitates building interpretative theories from the emerging data and selecting a new sample to examine and elaborate on this theory. (Marshall, 1996, p. 523)

Theoretical sampling allows for concept emergence and analysis to be an ongoing part of sampling methods. It involves gathering data in succession, analyzing them, using that analysis to guide more data gathering, analyzing them, and so on until additional effort brings no new learning and the researcher is satisfied with his or her understanding (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). Following this method, and engagingly including or excluding concepts facilitated saturation.

As Creswell (2005) explained, "[q]ualitative data is a cyclical, iterative process of reviewing data for common topic or themes. . .[c]lassifying small pieces of data into more general categories is the qualitative researchers way to make sense and find connections"

(p. 481). Data, transcripts of interview audio, field notes, respondent feedback, and document contents were synthesized "into small pieces of data, and these pieces [were]. . . integrated into categories" (p. 481) and more general patterns. Simultaneous to document review, interview data was transcribed verbatim and analyzed immediately following each interview. The immediate coding and document review process allowed "the reduction of narrative data to a manageable form to allow sorting to occur" (Creswell, 2005, p. 481). Following immediate coding, data were interpreted, selected and organized into categories, theme patterns were traced and recorded, and quotations were used to illustrate major theme patterns.

Demographic information collected at the beginning of the study's protocols resulted in coding that linked years of experience, position type, and other characteristics. The process of coding the demographic information resulted in deduction of differences and similarities, as they may exist, by respondent or document type and content. Table 13 illustrates a summary of research questions, sources of data, and data collection and analysis procedures.

Results of the *Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions* were expressed in a contingency table format illustrating quantifiable data such as the total number of "yes" responses and the total number of "no" responses. Consolidated results of the *Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions* were used to choose select common-practice case institutions and to guide the researcher on how to proceed with choosing a case institution or not. Institutions meeting ninety percent of the criteria on the *Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions* were considered for the study.

Results will be used to discuss the cyclical intersection of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning among student affairs administrators and practitioners evaluating their effectiveness. Findings will be presented in narrative form and will discuss themes and patterns

that emerge from the interviews, conceptual framework, and document review. Future research

possibilities and recommendations based on the findings will also be offered to determine how to

turn data into information that helps students succeed.

Table 13

Research Questions, Sources of Data, Data Collection and Data Analysis Method Matrix

Research Questions	Source of Data	Data Collection Action	Data Analysis Procedure
How are divisional assessment processes linked to student learning?	• Field-specific literature • Field-specific practitioner interviews (Skype-based)- using interview protocol • Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.)	• Literature Review • Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions Protocol (APPENDIX A.) • Researcher identity memo	• Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.) • Multiple case study design • Data Coding (open, axial, selective) • Constant Comparison • Member checking • Triangulazation
How are divisional strategic plan(s) linked to student learning?	• Field-specific literature • Field-specific practitioner interviews (Skype-based)- using interview protocol • Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.)	• Literature Review • Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions Protocol (APPENDIX A.)	• Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.) • Multiple case study design • Data Coding (open, axial, selective) • Constant Comparison • Member checking • Triangulazation
How do student affairs divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment?	• Field-specific literature • Field-specific practitioner interviews (Skype-based) - using interview protocol • Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.)	• Literature Review • Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions Protocol (APPENDIX A.)	• Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.) • Multiple case study design • Data Coding (open, axial, selective) • Constant Comparison • Member checking • Triangulazation

Table 13. *Research Questions, Sources of Data, Data Collection and Data Analysis Method Matrix (continued)*

Research Questions	Source of Data	Data Collection Action	Data Analysis Procedure
Who is involved in divisions' assessment and/or strategic planning, and what are the major responsibilities of these individuals?	• Field-specific literature • Field-specific practitioner interviews (Skype-based)- using interview protocol • Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.)	• Literature Review • Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions Protocol (APPENDIX A.)	• Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.) • Multiple case study design • Data Coding (open, axial, selective) • Constant Comparison • Member checking • Triangulazation
What are common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning?	• Field-specific literature • Field-specific practitioner interviews (Skype-based)- using interview protocol • Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.)	• Literature Review • Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions Protocol (APPENDIX A.)	• Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C.) • Multiple case study design • Data Coding (open, axial, selective) • Constant Comparison • Member checking • Triangulazation

Pretest and Pilot Procedures

Pretest and pilot processes were conducted. Pretesting was completed in three stages to test the validity and transferability of the interview protocol instrument. Pretesting processing included a review by non-field-specific experts, peer debriefing with field-specific experts and among a small sample of student affairs administrators who hold membership in the ACPA and the NASPA. The process helped to establish credibility for the study through peer examination, and the pursuit of structural coherence of the instrument. The non-expert review entailed providing the purpose of the study, the instrument and research questions and asking if the questions on the instrument pertain to one or more of the five research questions. During the

field-specific expert review, the purpose of the study, the first iteration of the conceptual

framework, the instrument along with the research questions were provided to the dissertation

committee for comment to complete a validation process. Then the purpose of the study, the first

iteration of the conceptual framework, the instrument and research questions were also provided

to colleagues holding membership in ACPA and NASPA. Each colleague provided feedback

based on their perspectives as student affairs practitioners. The amalgamation of feedback

provided direction that was used in a succeeding iteration of the instrument.

Student affairs practitioner reviewers were selected using convenience sampling.

Reviewers included individuals from a diverse representation of institutions and administrative

levels. Practitioners were solicited using an initial informal email to 15 individuals. Nine

responded and indicated an interest in assisting with the validation process. The nine

practitioners were invited via email to provide feedback on the instrument and whether it aligned

with the research questions and initial conceptual framework. Each of the nine practitioners who

expressed interest in assisting, submitted feedback prior to the deadline indicated in the email

they received.

The following were recommendations from non-field-specific, field-specific, and

professional association-related reviewers': (a) organize the questions into categories of

assessment, strategic planning, student learning, and linkages, if possible; (b) purposefully

shorten the number of questions on the instrument; and (c) pose broad open ended questions

initially, if questions are not answered to satisfaction, then ask prompt questions (instead of

making prompt questions stand alone questions), and (d) include a demographic question which

asks how many years the participant has been in the field of student affairs (the reviewers note

that this question will situate a more dense description therefore strengthening the study's

transferability). Edits were made to the instrument based on feedback received. Edits were made prior to and after conducting the pilot test.

Pilot Study

Prior to commencing full implementation of the formal study the researcher conducted a pilot study to correct for any issues regarding methodology, design and to further establish trustworthiness and credibility of the interview protocol instrument by testing its structural coherence. The pilot consisted of two phases. The first phase included two face-to-face interviews at a large, public university located in the southwest coast of the United States, using the semi-structured Interview Protocol (Appendix B) and the Pilot Interview Moderator Outline (Appendix L). The second phase included two Skype-based interviews using Appendix B, Appendix L, and Skype (Version 5.1), a real-time web conferencing tool for audio, video, and textual communication. Respondents to the pilot study were engaged by in-person and cyber means, avoiding expensive travel costs.

Pilot study data collection. Yin (2009) articulated that a pilot helps "to refine your data collecting plans with respect to both the content of the data and the procedures to be followed" (p. 92). The pilot is not intended to collect data for the main study. This pilot test did not serve as a pretest, rather "the pilot case is more informative, assisting…to develop relevant lines of questions…even providing some conceptual clarification for the research design" (p. 92). Data was gathered specifically from student affairs professionals directly involved in assessment or strategic planning. Interviews with each respondent were guided by the Interview Protocol (Appendix B) derivative of the literature review and the Pilot Interview Moderator Outline (Appendix L). Each respondent also provided feedback on the solicitation letters outlined in the appendices. As a shoulder partner during the in-person pilot phase, and via Skype with the

remaining two professionals, each solicitation letter was read aloud with pilot study respondents. The Interview Protocol (Appendix B), which includes language about privacy, confidentiality, and rights as a research subject was read in its entirety before any questions were posed to the respondent.

During phase one and two of the pilot study, a document was applied to the Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C) and was found to have met study requirements. Application of the document to The Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C) was completed to determine how the document applies to strategic planning, assessment, student learning, and linkages in support of the initial conceptual framework. The document gleaned was *The Way* (a pseudonym derived from the student affairs division's guiding document), a document that weaves the mission, vision, and objectives of both the division and the institution.

Pilot procedure. The Vice President of Student Affairs was the initial contact for phase one of the pilot procedure. Contacted via email, the Vice President recommended speaking with two Associate Deans who are directly responsible for fostering student learning, and connecting student learning to assessment and strategic planning. The Vice President connected me via email to each Associate Dean whereby communication was made to negotiate a date and time to interact with each of them. Before and after each visit, each respondent was asked to submit to me any documents pertinent to our conversation about the convergence or divergence of student learning, assessment, and strategic planning.

During phase two of the pilot study two professionals were chosen using convenience sampling. Each professional was communicated with initially via telephone and then via email to solidify a date and time for the Skype call. Email was also utilized with Skype-based pilot participants to secure pertinent documents prior to and after the pilot interview process. During

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both phases one and two of the pilot process, technical perspective was received on the structure, design, presentation, and administration of the protocol instrument and the solicitation documents. Both pre tester and pilot respondents were able to offer perspective about the length, appearance, and sensibility of the text.

Pilot study data analysis. Conceptualization of assessment, strategic planning and student learning at this institution were completed by utilizing constant comparison. Using the document content analysis instrument, the researcher applied *The Way* - the main document referred to during each pilot interview, to the document analysis instrument in addition to analyzing field notes and respondent feedback taken during the interviews phase one and two. According to the suggestions of each of the four respondents, no significant changes were made to the instruments or solicitation letters.

Pilot study results. This particular institution has a model that is not illustrated in literature of practice. The interview and document analyses reveal that the institution and the division have one document that encompasses strategic planning, student learning, and assessment. There is not a separate mission statement for the institution and the division of student affairs – yet the institution has four campuses. The prevalence of this institutional/divisional model may have major implications for the conceptual framework of this study should this model be prevalent in other cases. Through the pilot study I was able to identify one typographical error that was noted in the respondent solicitation letter and it was corrected.

CHAPTER 4. INSTITUTIONAL CASE SUMMARIES

This chapter will report comprehensive summaries that will include background and structure of each institution and of their respective student affairs divisions, characteristics of respondents, within case review of assessment in student affairs, strategic planning in student affairs, learning outcomes in student affairs, and linkages among assessment, strategic planning, and student learning.

Middle States University

Background and Structure

Middle States University (MSU) is a public land-grant university located in the central United States. Founded in 1856, MSU became a land-grant institution after the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862. MSU, a *CampusLabs* affiliate, is the largest university in the state, and is situated in an urban community. With Fall 2010 enrollment of more than 37,000 students, MSU considers itself a "powerful economic engine for the state" (MSU President's Webpage, 2013). Classified by the Carnegie Foundation (2013) as a research institution with very high research activity, MSU educates approximately 27,000 undergraduate and 10,000 graduate students, with 37.8 percent U.S. students of color and over 3000 international students (MSU Facts and Figures, 2013). Students are currently enrolled at MSU across twelve academic colleges housing 127 undergraduate majors and 112 graduate degrees. MSU is accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Higher Education and hosts nationally recognized programs in engineering and pharmacy. According to the institutional mission statement, MSU

> …creates and applies knowledge for the benefit of the economy and culture of the state,
>
> the region, the nation, and beyond…the university shares its research educational,

cultural and technological strengths with business, government, and other educational

institutions. The University advances knowledge, provides outstanding and innovative

instruction, and nourishes a climate of intellectual growth in a broad range of academic

disciplines and interdisciplinary fields (MSU Mission and Goals Statement, 2013).

Student Affairs Division Overview

MSU's mission statement for the Division of Student Affairs encompasses three sections

that include cross-cultural diversity, functional emphases, and management standards. The

mission statement, in part, states that MSU

> …is a comprehensive land grant institution dedicated to providing education of the
>
> highest quality possible to undergraduate and graduate students. Achieving this goal is
>
> dependent upon the creation of campus environments that are both supportive and
>
> stimulating, and the provision of a range of experiences in which personal development
>
> thrives and learning flourishes. Accordingly, the Division of Student Affairs provides
>
> services and programs that foster academic success and promote student development.
>
> (MSU Division of Student Affairs Mission Statement, 2013)

The organizational chart for the division reveals that the Vice President for Student

Affairs reports directly to the President of the University. The Division of Student Affairs

comprises fifteen units. Each reporting to the Vice President for Student Affairs, three Assistant

Vice Presidents each supervise four to five Director-level direct reports who in turn are charged

with the responsibility of guiding the work of those units (Division of Student Affairs

Organization Chart, 2012). Examples of the division's units include Dining Services, Student

Conduct, and Fraternity and Sorority Life.

Participants at MSU. Table 14 provides additional participant characteristics of the practitioners interviewed at MSU.

Eddy. Eddy has been an MSU employee for 15 years and has served in Campus and Recreation Services for 10 years. Eddy described his role in assessment and strategic planning as such:

> …general, our assessment and strategic planning tends to be decentralized, so my role is more department focused. In general, we do risk audits so we measure the degree to our different programs…we also do need satisfaction assessments.

Marsha. Marsha's unit in student affairs is the MSU Student Union. Marsha has served as the Director of the MSU Student Union for 30 years. She described the Student Union staff as trailblazers in strategic planning at MSU and credits the staff as those who piloted assessment efforts for the division. Marsha also has experience as an external reviewer. When asked to describe her role in assessment, she revealed the following:

> I've done some large research projecting including one on spirituality on campus. Um, and um, so I've done research assessment and um, evaluations, and I would say as for a department that is something that we expect of all of our colleagues, is that they are regularly doing at least some sort of evaluation and/or assessment.

Goodwin. At the time of the interview, Goodwin was newly appointed, but had served in the role of Director of Student Conduct for 17 years. Goodwin also served on the learning outcome and and goal setting. When I asked Goodwin to tell me about her role in student affairs assessment, strategic planning, or both of those, the response was primarily from a unit perspective.

Table 14

MSU Interview Respondent Characteristics

Participant	Position	Years at Institution	Unit in Student Affairs	Role in Assessment	Role in Strategic Planning
1	Campus & Recreation Services Director	15	Campus & Recreation Services	Unit Focused Assessment	Unit Focused Strategic Planning
2	Student Union Director	30	Student Union	- Unit & Institutional Assessment	-------
3	Student Conduct Director	17	Student Conduct	- Participants on learning outcome and assessment taskforce & Unit Focused Assessment	Unit Focused Strategic Planning

Well, most recently I served on our learning outcome and assessment taskforce at the

university for the division of student affairs. um. And I did that until I became director

a…this past September. Um. So, most recently, as the director of the office, I oversee,

um…learning outcomes and assessment within my unit, which is the office of student

conduct. And I'm also responsible for strategic planning and goal setting within um…the

office of student conduct as the director.

Assessment in Student Affairs at Middle States University

The Division of Student Affairs at MSU began assessing the co-curricular on a trial basis

with the Student Union unit. As MSU leadership set the division-wide planning process, lessons

and practices were absorbed from the trial period and imposed upon the entire division.

Responsibility for the division's assessment process is in the care of a division-wide assessment

council, which is appointed by the Vice President of Student Affairs and comprised of one staff member from each unit. The Vice President of Student Affairs chairs the committee.

The division-wide committee is responsible for providing structure for assessment activity within the division. Functions of the assessment council are:

- Provide tools to conduct assessment (reports, books/articles)

- Provide opportunities for people within the division to share knowledge (brown bags, annual conference where research and assessment results and practices

- Assist with managing data to include in annual reporting

Individuals serving on the committee are responsible for communication between the committee and their respective units. There is also a learning outcome and assessment taskforce that function to compose learning outcomes by unit as they relate to the assessment within the division. The taskforce also has representatives from each unit.

Respondents were asked to paint a picture of how assessment operates in the division. Each participant focused part of their remarks to the role of the assessment committee who furnishes the division with support for unit and divisional assessment, and training and tools to perform assessment. Goodwin replied:

Essentially how that works is that each unit within the division is responsible for their own assessment and their own learning outcomes, but there is a support within the division a…for those a…a. assessment activities and learning outcomes.

Respondents expressed pride and the value of their respective units holding place on the assessment committee. Goodwin articulated,

And we have representatives from almost every unit within our division. And um…they meet on a regular basis. Usually, every other week. Um…they have missions, goals, kind

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of a committee structure where there's a general body committee and then there's also a steering committee. Um…They meet at least 90 minutes once a month. And then the steering committee meets on the off weeks for 30 minutes.

Marsha also conveyed praise of the assessment committee's leadership.

In our division, um, you know, there is a division wide committee, uh, it happens to be chaired by, an assistant vice president and my, one of my colleagues, the woman who is in charge of our departmental assessment is terrific, and so she chairs that.

Respondent remarks reveal that place on the committee commands a positive reputation among colleagues and that it is a prestigious position. These remarks also offer insights into what Eddy reported as foundational roles supporting both units and the division. He revealed that

… the division is very decentralized. Our current assessment, many people in different departments manage their own assessment. In the division we do have a - there is one coordinating committee and there are a few us, the steering committee who specifically have assessment as our job function and what we do is we try to provide resources to younger professionals or those who don't do assessment as much. Try to help them understand how they may use data.

See below for a summary of MSU participant interview data.

Respondents were also asked to speak to the major goals of the division's assessment efforts. One respondent citied student learning as a major goal of divisional assessment. Goodwin acknowledged the following:

um…well, the major goals of our assessment efforts are one, to inform practice and decision making, to enhance services to students, and then also promote and document student learning.

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Participant interview data at MSU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participant(s) indicated ownership of the assessment process at the unit level

- Participant(s) expressed pride in the assessment committee

- Participant(s) communicated support by the assessment committee, and steering committee

- Participants(s) share that divisional assessment work is decentralized

Eddy and Marsha suggested other goals for assessment such as physical sustainability of buildings and grounds, student employment and performance review, and assessment of workplace wellness. Marsha's responses in reference to student employment included rhetoric of student learning.

> But the other piece is, you know, it's also about student employment. So for instance, we have learning outcomes associated with our 400 students that work for us and one of the things that we have is a program…and that program allows to take there employment and um, you know, identify some learning goals they want in terms of their own professional development.

> When asked who is involved in the division's assessment, and what are the major responsibilities of these individuals, respondents reported conflicting information. Goodwin understood the assessment council to be chaired by two individuals, and that the Assistant Vice President oversaw the council in addition to serving on the council. The other respondents from MSU understood that the chair of the council was the Vice President of Student Affairs. It was consistent among respondents that "the division's assessment process works" with the council held responsible for the assessment planning process within the division.

MSU conducts inter-divisional assessment project collaboration. Eddy spoke about a

Student Affairs assessment learning outcomes committee that differs from the assessment

council.

> for assessment, well there is the Student Affairs assessment learning outcomes group, and
>
> then within departments… a few departments… For example, the union, resident life,
>
> campus recreations services and then counseling center. They all have people specifically
>
> assigned to do assessment as part of their job portfolio. So, by department there's people
>
> who are involved in assessment. And one of the things that we are trying to do with this
>
> Student Affairs learning outcomes group is to move more towards formation and
>
> collaboration. So, that there is… like I mentioned before, there's some of that cross-
>
> programming, if you will, or cross-data collection.

Strategic Planning in Student Affairs at Middle States University

Just as assessment occurs on a unit or departmental level at MSU, strategic planning does

also. Eddy stated that, "it looks very decentralized, it's managed from the top and it's really

conducted department by department". The way he describes the process, the Vice-President

communicates strategic priorities to the Assistant Vice-President and directors of the

departments under their charge, the Vice-President and the Assistant Vice-President

communicates strategic priorities, then directors are expected to guide their staff in strategic

planning to make sure that the overall objectives are met. Goodwin described the process as

much the same.

> Each of the units has a meeting with the vice president and her immediate staff and our
>
> responsibilities at that meeting are to contribute to the division's planning and to their
>
> strategic planning. Even though we don't have a written strategic plan, but that's part of

the planning process. So our divisional initiatives, are typically, they typically, come out of um…our annual report.

When asked how does the strategic planning process operate in your division? And what are the major goals of the strategic plan? Goodwin said, "Interesting that you ask that. We do not have a divisional strategic plan. We have a university-wide strategic plan. But the division of student affairs does not have a strategic plan". Marsha also revealed that a strategic plan for the entire division does not exist.

…for us, we're a very complex institution so our division's strategic planning process is… because of how complex our division is, you know, clearly we are asked, again, to respond to divisional goals but there has not been a strategic review.

The lack of a divisional strategic plan causes challenges. Goodwin said, "Now with that said, we have goal setting within our units. And sometimes, you know, depending on the director, they're connecting it to, um, you know, the university strategic plan, or not". Goodwin's comments highlight that dependent upon the whim of the leadership; practice may or may not be connected to the university's strategic plan. Marsha also reflected on the lack of strategic plan as an asset by saying that "in some institutions where the division drives the agenda. For us, I think the agenda is more specifically driven by the departments".

An advisory group that includes students, alumni, faculty, and staff, showcase departmental research to connect the university strategic plan with the work completed in the division. Marsha asserted this:

So when we're doing a strategic plan, you know, one of the things we have to be sensitive to the ethos of the campus you're a part of. So, you know, we want to look at issues of research, we want to look at weather or not we're supporting the land grant

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mission of the institution…so, um, you know…like again…I think it really depends on were you are and how in depth you wanna go.

Participant interview data related to strategic planning at MSU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participant(s) view lack of Student Affairs Division Strategic Plan as an asset and a liability

- Participant(s) handle strategic planning as a decentralized operation, by unit

- Participant(s) revealed that connecting practice to the university strategic plan is by practitioner choice

A synthesis of interview data confirm that persons involved in divisions' strategic planning are the Vice President, her immediate staff which consisting of three assistant vice presidents, the Vice Presidents chief of staff, a wide variety of directors of each unit, of which there are 13, the assessment council and the learning outcome and assessment taskforce. As needed, experts are invited into the conversation by assessment council to address emergent needs of the council.

Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs at Middle States University

Six years ago MSU underwent accreditation. The accreditation agency cited learning outcome documentation as an institutional challenge. One respondent reported.

It was required of all. Um…academic units within the division to actually do strategic planning and um…because our, our…um, um…university adopted a strategic plan and was in the process of adopting a strategic plan so they [accrediting body] had asked that all units, faculty and   academic units within the division work on assessment and learning outcomes.

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Initially Student Affairs was not implicated in the process to address accreditation concerns with academic partners. The Vice President of Student Affairs realized that Student Affairs had an opportunity to measure student learning beyond basic evaluations and to solidify their campus presence as educators. When reflecting on why student affairs became involved, one respondent commented

> Well, I, you know, in some ways, its simple. Because um…our goal as a division, we see ourselves as educators, most of us. So, we want students to learn from their experiences with us from programs from services.

After the value of divisional involvement was determined by the Vice President of Student affairs, professionals were charged to assemble on behalf of the Division of Student Affairs. These 15 individuals, referred to as the Learning Outcome and Assessment Taskforce, are representatives from each student affairs unit that have responsibility within their departments for learning outcomes. Some serving on the committee are specifically assigned to conduct assessment as part of their job portfolio. Representatives include directors, assistant and associate directors. Meetings occur on a bi-weekly basis as part of a steering committee that meets 30 minutes each meeting or a general body committee, which meets 90 minutes each meeting. Each unit director is responsible for learning outcomes their area. According to Goodwin,

> each of our departments have student learning outcomes, and that we assess those student learning outcomes on a regular basis. And then um, based on what we learn from our assessment, we um…work to enhance our programs, or our services, to enhance student learning.

Although it was difficult to gain the details of how this process outlined by Goodwin was completed divisionally, each respondent mentioned that learning outcomes are based on CAS standards. Eddy informed that rubrics are utilized to measure some of the learning outcomes. He further informed that learning outcomes are formally measured or informally measured. For example, Eddy's unit encompasses several staff members, is larger than other units in the division, and formally measures 35 learning outcomes. Other units with smaller amounts of staff members formally measure less learning outcomes. Respondents made transparent that support for each unit such as an online toolkit for designing learning outcomes, is available from the Learning Outcome and Assessment Taskforce. MSU also employs an Associate Provost for Learning and Assessment. This person in this role coordinates data, collects information for the Student Affairs Division, assists practitioners who wish to publish the data, and determine if projects require institutional research board approval. Participant interview data concerning learning outcomes planning at MSU can be summarized as follows;

- Participant(s) revealed that Student Affairs followed Academic Affairs in measuring student learning outcomes

- Participant(s) shared that student learning outcome development began as the division of Student Affairs wanted to be recognized as educators

- Participant(s) informed that student learning outcomes and domains are based on CAS standards

- Participant(s) informed that dependent upon unit size more or less learning outcomes will be formally measured

Participants were asked, how are divisional strategic plan(s) linked to student learning? Goodwin replied,

we base our learning outcomes and our assessment plan on the CAS standards and, um, you know, how we, I guess, link all this together is that within each of our units, we are required to do assessment, we are required to assess student learning outcomes. So for our different programs or initiatives within our unit…For example, in student conduct, something that um…we value and that we hope that student's learn from going through our process is um...ethical development and ethical decision-making. So, we have different tools that we use to assess um, if students are basically increasing their level of ethical decision-making or their um, a. ethical development. And then, we will assess that and then we will link our, the results of our assessment to our planning, or I don't know if I want to call it strategic planning, but our planning and goals for our unit.

Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning Linkages at Middle States University

Since MSU does not have a strategic plan for student affairs, a clear link between divisional strategy, assessment and co-curricular student learning was difficult to distinguish. One participant stated, "There has been no division strategic planning process. We are involved in departmental strategic planning processes". It was clear that MSU's Student Affairs division did not have a divisional strategic plan, nor deliberately apply assessment data to strategy to bring about student learning from the division level. Student Affairs at MSU works by unit to determine linkages. Those links are devoid of a connection to a larger strategic vision for learning within the division. When asked if there had ever been a plan for the division to have a strategic plan, Marsha responded by saying,

we're a very complex institution and so our division's strategic planning process is to ensure that all of the departments within the division, um…are looking at

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themselves…looking at themselves in the context of, you know, where we are in the institution but also looking at the themselves in, uh, the context of our peers and other institutions.

As revealed by Marsha's comments, MSU's Student Affairs units critique themselves against accreditation standards and peer institutions. This is done much in the fashion that an academic department may search and secure accreditation from an association in order to operate legitimately. Marsha's references to student learning in the context of goal setting instead of strategic planning were prevalent throughout the interview. For example, she stated, "There are, um, accreditation reviews, you know, where student affairs is a critical player, um, but…there…there's not…there has not been a strategical (sic) review". When asked to provide an example of connecting student learning to strategic outcomes, Goodwin failed to explain deliberate linking of unit activity and student learning outcomes for strategic planning.

For example, in student conduct, something that um…we value and that we hope that student's learn from going through our process is um...ethical development and ethical decision-making. So, we have different tools that we use to assess um, if students are basically increasing their level of ethical decision-making or their um, a. ethical development. And then, we will assess that and then we will link our, the results of our assessment to our planning, or I don't know if I want to call it strategic planning, but our planning and goals for our unit.

In juxtaposition, Goodwin referenced the work in her unit as strategic planning.

So we're not creating new, um, you know, outcomes or goals that we have, didn't have before, but we're looking at what services we provide, what programs we offer, and what opportunities students have to learn within our units and within the division. And then we

assess those programs, those um…a…services, and then we link that to our strategic

planning.

In addition to doing unit-level strategic planning, which respondents referred to setting

goals, assessment also occurs at the unit level. The rationale for conducting assessment by unit is

due to diversity of activity in each unit. One respondent stated, "But our goals are so different, so

we don't really do divisional assessment goals, but within our units". Goodwin also provided

insight in this regard.

> So when we assess students, if they are not learning what we think that they are, we
>
> might set a goal, for example, to do more programs, within the university community, to
>
> increase um, students opportunity to engage in ethical discussions. We might set a goal to
>
> um, maybe have um, small group discussions in maybe 30 classrooms throughout the
>
> course of the semester or throughout the course of the year. So that we can have
>
> conversations with students to give them an opportunity to at least examine their ethical
>
> decision-making. So that's how we develop our goals, is based on what's lacking like
>
> where are our short comings… What are students not learning that we hope that they're
>
> learning and then we incorporate that into our goal planning.

Participant interview data of linkages at MSU can be summarized in the following points

- Participant(s) indicate that linkages to divisional strategic planning is not
  comprehensively completed due to the lack of a divisional strategic plan
- Participant(s) value unit level control to identify student learning deficiency
- Participant(s) reveal that assessment is an annual process that can be formally or
  informally measured within units

- The Learning Outcome and Assessment Taskforce developed learning outcomes that units may or may not connect unit level activity to.

- Participant(s) referred to strategic priorities as being set by the division leadership and the control of priority implementation as optional and controlled at the unit level

New England University

Background and Structure

New England University (NEU) is a public land-grant university located in the northeast United States. Founded in 1881, NEU became a land-grant institution after the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862. Considered a land, sea, and space grant institution, NEU's reach covers over 4,500 acres of land. NEU is also a *CampusLabs* affiliate. Classified by the Carnegie Foundation (2013) as a research institution with very high research activity, the university employs an approximate 9,872 staff and faculty (NEU Fact Sheet 2013, p. 1). Approximately 22,301 undergraduate students attend NEU with 26 percent of those undergraduates as U.S. students of color (p. 1). There are 7,955 graduate students who attend NEU of which 17 percent are U.S. students of color (p. 1). International students are 3 percent of undergraduates and 18 percent of the graduate students currently enrolled (p. 1).

NEU has eight undergraduate degrees in 102 majors and 17 graduate degrees in 88 areas of research and professional practice across fourteen academic colleges (p. 1). Accredited by the New England Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Institutions of Higher Education, NEU houses nationally recognized programs in medicine, nursing, and law (p. 2). In part, the NEU mission statement adopted in 2006 states the following:

…we create and disseminate knowledge by means of scholarly and creative achievements, graduate and professional education, and outreach. Through our focus on

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teaching and learning, the University helps every student grow intellectually and become a contributing member of the state, national, and world communities. Through research, teaching, service, and outreach, we embrace diversity and cultivate leadership, integrity, and engaged citizenship in our students, faculty, staff, and alumni. As our state's flagship public land and sea grant institution, we promote the health and well-being…through enhancing the social, economic, cultural, and natural environments of the state and beyond. (NEU Mission Statement, 2006).

One NEU participant said, "the goal [of Student Affairs] is always the center of it is the academic mission of the university. We support the academic mission of the university".

Student Affairs Division overview and division structure. In addition to citing guiding principles such as valuing people, integrity, and diversity, NEU's mission statement for the Division of Student Affairs states

The Division of Student Affairs provides programs, services, and co-curricular experiences that enhance student success. Our efforts support the development of the whole person by fostering an awareness of lifelong learning and promoting the development of skills for effective citizenship in a diverse world. We promote a vibrant intellectual climate that supports an active and inclusive community. We strive to be reflective and intentional in an ever–changing environment. (NEU Division of Student Affairs Mission Statement, 2013)

The organizational chart for the division reveals that the Vice President for Student Affairs reports directly to the President of the University. The Division of Student Affairs comprises sixteen units. Five Assistant Vice Presidents supervise two to five director-level direct reports who in turn are charged with the responsibility of guiding the work of their respective

units (Division of Student Affairs Organization Chart, 2013). As the NEU division values and guiding principles compliment the mission statement, the guiding values and principles steer efforts in pursuit of specific priorities and goals within the division's units. Examples of the division's units include Career Services, The Center for Students with Disabilities, and the Asian American Cultural Center. One NEU participant commented,

> I say, we need to pull together … part of the problem is that at least here, student affairs does so many different things it's sometimes hard to find a common ground. We have, the department of career services, and students with disabilities, community standards or judicial life, res life, student health services, student union and that's how they have hard time seeing how they all are really working towards the same goal because the – their missions are very different.

Participants at NEU. Three participants from NEU were interviewed. Table 15 explains participant characteristics.

Christie. Christie has been at NEU for 5 ½ years and holds dual appointments. She serves as the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs and the Director of Student Activities. Under her control are two units. One is the Vice President's Office and the other is Student Activities. Christie was asked to describe her role in student affairs assessment, strategic planning or both in either of her roles or both of them. She explained the following:

> The Division of Affairs has two division committees. We do have an assessment committee and a strategic planning committee, and I serve on both of those. And I serve as a representative of Student Affairs – but also, I mean, a representative of Student activities but also just because those happens to be two interest areas of mine.

Table 15

NEU Interview Respondent Characteristics

Participant	Position	Years at Institution	Unit in Student Affairs	Role in Assessment	Role in Strategic Planning
1	Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs & the Director of Student Activities	5 1/2	Student Affairs & the Director of Student Activities	Serves on assessment committee	Serves on strategic planning committee
2	Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs & Director of Senior Transition and Engagement Programs	7	Vice President for Student Affairs	Originally involved in student affairs assessment at the institution	Part of the strategic planning committee starting in 2005.
3	Director of Student Affairs Information Technology	7	Student affairs information technology	Researched assessment and developed an assessment plan for student affairs Co-chair of student affairs advisory council – SAAC	

Daniel. Daniel has worked in the Office of the Vice President of Student affairs for seven

years as Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs & Director of Senior Transition and

Engagement Programs. When asked about his role in student affairs assessment, strategic

planning or both, Daniel acknowledged that he had been involved for longer in student affairs

strategic planning than in student affairs assessment. Daniel had originally been involved in

student affairs assessment as part of the division's strategic planning committee starting in 2005.

The committee was charged with reviewing the division's strategic planning activity on an

ongoing process. After the committee was dissolved, Daniel was asked to share the most current

version of the strategic plan with NEU's new strategic planning committee and develop a new

strategic plan.

     Thomas. Thomas has served in the department of Student Affairs Information

Technology for at least seven years. In his role, he served on a committee that was charged with

researching assessment and developing an assessment plan for student affairs. Thomas also

served on the strategic planning committee.

Assessment in Student Affairs at New England University

     A synthesis of interview data and document analysis revealed that in 2006, a

reaccreditation visit to NEU resulted in the need to assess. Thomas explained that in spite of the

threat of accreditation loss, resources to support assessment at NEU have not been forthcoming,

resulting in weak assessment processes.

> They [accrediting body] came around asking about the university and what we - should
>
> be reaccredited or not. So, ah…the university had not done a lot of assessment, we had a
>
> hard time answering a lot of the questions that were asked. And this is what drove our
>
> VP of student affairs to say: We need to do it, we need to do this, and so he's driving us
>
> to assess what we do, and so when we are asked again in 5 more years, when the
>
> reaccreditation is due again. What we have we done? How can we prove what we've

done? So that's what is driving this, but it is not being funded well, and so, you know, my department pays for campus labs. …it's all been done kind of to seat the pants.

During Fall 2007, under the charge of the Vice President of Student Affairs, the Division of Student Affairs Strategic Planning Committee created an Assessment Division Initiative, which built capacity within the division to accomplish high quality assessment. In 2008, the Assessment Division Initiative committee created a divisional assessment plan that outlined the following:

- A philosophy of assessment for the division

- The assessment model for the division

- How to report findings

- Resources for student affairs practitioners dealing with assessment and strategic planning

- History of assessment in the division

- Environmental scan reports of the committee

Following the launch of the divisional assessment plan, the Vice President of Student Affairs charged the Student Affairs Assessment Advisory Council (SAAAC) with operation of divisional assessment initiatives. According to the NEU Division of Student Affairs website (2013), the SAAAC's mission

is to enhance student learning/development and organizational effectiveness by providing assessment guidance and assistance to the Division of Student Affairs and its individual departments. SAAAC actively shares knowledge about best assessment practice, works to enhance the Division's understanding of NEU students, staff, and faculty and their

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experiences. Further, SAAAC coordinates use of designated assessment tools, such as StudentVoice. (p. 1)

SAAAC helped to create the Student Affairs Assessment model found outlined in the most current Assessment Plan dated August 2010. Within the Assessment Plan, it is articulated that NEU's Assessment Model

> …provides the framework that will enable each student affairs unit to annually report assessment findings and resultant actions in a systematic fashion…All components of the Assessment Model must be grounded in the Division of Student Affairs mission to provide programs services, and co-curricular experiences that enhance student success. (NEU Division of Student Affairs, 2013)

The plan contains three components. The first component is metrics which as one respondent read from the division website,

> are simple numeric indicators, which could include such assessments as: tracking who uses our programs, services and facilities; monitoring level of student and clientele satisfaction; examining resource utilization; reviewing response times. (NEU Division of Student Affairs, 2013)

> The second component of the assessment plan is learning outcome assessment that measures the impact of NEU's initiatives relating to student learning in relation to services. And third is unit review. Unit review is a process to examine the function of an individual unit every five to seven years by self-study, external review, and other methods. Metrics, outcomes assessment, and unit review are all designed to lead to improvement initiatives and are explained in the assessment plan to be built on division mission and priorities. As a member of the SAAAC committee, Christie explained the work.

We studied assessment plans at other universities; we interviewed the directors of all the departments in student affairs to determine what kind of assessment they were already doing. Um. We read literature on student affairs assessment. And uh so…In the end, ah…we created an assessment plan that would be in three parts. Um. One, division metrics. Um. Two, learning and service outcomes. And three, um…unit review.

Each unit utilizes a template that accounts for strategic metrics by unit and by division. Table 16 illustrates the use of metrics at NEU. This document underwent document review for this study. Identifying information has been removed to protect the identity of the institution. This table is an example of the template that each unit completes each year to convey the unit's strategic contributions intended for the next academic year. David shared this about the annual process.

I think what we try to do is establish central assessment components that everyone in the division needs to assess; a central recording requirements while allowing units to kind of use their own sort of local knowledge expertise of their own operation to determine kind of content within those assessment areas. So we have, we ask departments to have a set of metrics on which they report. Those metrics are either division/department metrics that everyone is required to report.

Tom also spoke to metrics as related to assessment. However, he identifies other exercises just as important.

One is the development of metrics; ah…the next one was the development of learning and service outcomes. And for outcome based assessment and then there was the a - peer review or external review of having your department reviewed by colleagues from outside the university.

Student Affairs Information Technology (SAIT) Department Metric Worksheet

This worksheet will allow units to indicate which strategic plan metrics they will report as well as develop and categorize additional unit-level metrics. Indicate the Strategic Metrics to which your unit will contribute by listing the specific items that will be counted under that metric. Additional unit metrics can be developed and categorized by supplying the metric and definition under the specific Strategic Priority to which the metric corresponds. If appropriate, specific items that will be counted under that metric can be listed as well.

Table 16

Annual Unit-Level Strategic Contribution Form

Metric	Definition	Items counted under metric
Student Engagement The Division of Student Affairs will provide programs, services, and co-curricular activities that enhance student learning, engage students in their academic and University experiences, and prepare students for the world of tomorrow.		
Strategic Plan Metrics		
% Students in leadership positions	Undergraduate students in leadership positions within the Division as a percentage of total Storrs FTE undergraduate enrollment calculated as an average of fall and spring registration numbers. The percentage will be calculated annually and will reflect all units within the Division.	
# Formal and informal partnerships between the Division of Student Affairs and academic units	The number of partnerships between units within the Division of Student Affairs and academic units within the University. The number will be tallied per academic year and will include counts for the previous summer. The number will be the sum of partnerships counted in all units within the Division.	

Table 16. *Annual Unit-Level Strategic Contribution Form (continued)*

Metric	Definition	Items counted under metric
Division-level Metrics		
Unit-level Metrics		
Money spent on student employee salaries	Total money spent on student employee salaries; this is a measure of student financial aid; the calculation is made for the current fiscal year (July 1 through reporting date); FRS data are used for the calculation.	

Effectiveness and Service Delivery
The Division of Student Affairs will support the institution's goals through a quality portfolio of services based on the principles of reliability, evidence based decision making, and effectiveness.

Strategic Plan Metrics

| % Reportable units who have fully implemented the Division Assessment Plan | Units determined to have fully implemented as a percentage of units in the Division Assessment Plan.
 The relevant Assistant Vice President and department heads will determine if a reportable unit will be considered to have fully implemented the Division Assessment Plan in consultation with the Vice President for Student Affairs. Details of implementation are contained in the Division Assessment Plan.

Determinations will be made annually at the end of each spring semester. | |
| % Reportable units who have a working Service Continuity Plan | Units determined to have a working Service Continuity Plan as a percentage of units in the Division of Student Affairs. The relevant Assistant Vice President and department head will determine if a reportable unit will be considered to have a working Service Continuity Plan in consultation with the Vice President for Student Affairs. To have a working Service Continuity Plan, units will have to have a written Service Continuity Plan as well as conduct annual testing and revision.

Determinations will be made annually at the end of each spring semester. | |

According to Christine, the "division assessment - we can paint assessment as very decentralized". She understands the division's assessment structure to be "very decentralized and very discipline specific". She goes on to justify the decentralization by stating "But we do have a set of guiding - an overarching plan and a set of guiding priorities that we all adhere to". A PDF of NEU's assessment plan can be found on the division's website. The plan outlines assessment timeline and incremental task implementation. When Daniel spoke about the assessment plan, he mentioned the following.

> Yes, some pieces are more detailed than others. So for example, program review has a very detailed description of what that's going to look like in terms of the process and the pieces, the components and the timeline for given program review. The outcomes assessment is less well defined because we wanted to get the document out there in peoples kind of psychic/conscious moving forward before we really had finalized what our outcome assessment was going to look like so, parts of the plan are more descriptive than others parts.

Participant interview data concerning assessment at NEU can be summarized as follows

- Participant(s) revealed assessment as decentralized and controlled at the unit level

- Participant(s) see the use of metrics as significant in the assessment process

- Participant(s) expressed lack of resources to conduct assessment

- Participant(s) communicated reactionary assessment in response to threat of losing accreditation

Providing education about assessment at NEU is not limited to assessment committee liaisons. Rather the information is proliferated throughout the division at least once per year during NEU's annual day of assessment. The assessment committee plans the event with a

master's program at NEU that is run jointly by the division of student affairs and the school of education. The event headlines an external speaker on learning outcomes in the morning. In the afternoon, people who are conducting assessment and research within the division present in break out sessions.

Strategic Planning in Student Affairs at New England University

The NEU strategic planning process was created from the assessment process. In 2005 the new Vice President of Student Affairs appointed the strategic planning committee to give strategic direction and forge divisional identity. Divisional identity was of paramount importance to the new Vice President and strategic planning was implemented to guide branding and identity. Daniel was originally involved with the group appointed in 2005. He reflected on his thoughts of the reason for the committee's formation.

> But I think the fact that it was a large part of that initial strategic planning effort was to really identify a divisional identity that we can all kind of cluster around; I think really helped sort of overcome that cultural push back because people were able to buy in and contribute. And it was in many ways a really grounds up strategic planning process. And so that initial plan really I think allowed the division to get behind the idea of planning as one unit; I think that was a sort of a impasse that people did not view themselves as the division of student affairs. Folks were you know in Res Life or committed to that. Or they were in student activities but there were a little bit/lack of divisional identity.

At the end of two years the strategic planning committee was dissolved and asked to report findings. A three-year plan was recommended and established in 2007. In 2009 during the second phase of the strategic plan, the division was shifted from the initial model of strategic planning to one that was more intentional through setting concrete goals for the division with

performance indicators. Under the current strategic model, lessons and practice from the division's assessment process, that included metrics and outcomes, became measurable. When asked how does strategic planning process operate in your division, Christine answered

> Very similarly [to assessment]. You know we had a committee that was made up of people from around the division. And again…It didn't have to be directors (there were a lot of directors on there) but, there were also other staff on there. They met for several years; developed the strategic priorities

According to the strategic priority document submitted by a respondent, NEU has five strategic priorities. The first is student engagement, which addresses student learning as it relates to student affairs programs, services and co-curricular activities. Second is effectiveness and services delivery. This means that "student affairs will support the institutions goals through a quality portfolio of service, service is based on the premise of reliability, evidence based decision-making and effectiveness" (NEU, Strategic Priority Notification, 2012). Diversity is the third priority; "the division of student affairs will foster a campus community that provides a welcoming environment, practice support of diverse student body and staff, and provides diverse culture for students and prepare students to succeed in the global environment" (p. 2).

The fourth is community engagement and service. According to the Strategic Priority Notification (2012), "the division of student affairs will provide opportunities for engagement between the institution and the community that will enhance learning, promote student engagement, and foster connections with the institution, and provide servicing to the community" (p. 2). The fifth strategic priority is alumni involvement and development fundraising. "The division of student affairs will provide opportunities and engage alumni in the institution, foster alumni development; enhance charitable support given the division

programming and priorities" (p. 2). Strategies were developed to help with the operation of the priorities. Metrics and percentages assist to strategize a respective goal.

Participant interview data relating to strategic planning at NEU can be summarized as follows.

- Participant(s) indicated that strategic planning grew from the divisions assessment process

- Participant(s) revealed that the strategic plan was created by representatives from each unit

- Participant(s) leadership initiated strategic planning as a method to determine division identity

Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs at New England University

Just as the assessment and strategic planning efforts are new at NEU, strategy for measuring student learning is also. Daniel stated, "We haven't been a division until recently that really looked at learning outcomes". Under the authority of the Vice President of Affairs, SAAAC develops learning outcomes, service outcomes and offers collegial support through their efforts. SAAAC also uses the divisional subscription to CampusLabs to facilitate creation and usage of student learning outcomes on a division and unit level. External review is used to critique student learning outcomes and can include either or both internal peer review or external peer review, employing colleagues from outside the university. Thomas admits that some of the methods to account for student learning do not work well.

Um, metrics is our….after this point is our major um…tool for assess- assessment.

Metrics don't really deal with student learning well. There are other ways to assess them.

Is what we are doing helping students learn? Um, I think we all um…believe we are

doing that, but we have no way to show that we are doing that. So we have not advanced

that very far yet.

Requirements set by SAAAC encourage the creation of student learning outcomes, assessment

goals, the conducting of divisional assessment, and reporting on activity using metrics based on

CAS-based priorities. Departments must define learning outcomes, are required to assess those

learning outcomes, report the results thereof, and outline steps they are going to take to

operationalize the assessment during the upcoming academic year. During discourse about this

process, Daniel shared the following.

So, that structure really reinforces the process thereof of establishing outcomes; assessing

whether there happening and then retooling your programming initiative into

programming to make sure that your outcomes are being met.

Due to the large amount of activity and responsibility at NEU, the Student Activities unit

is a good example to illustrate how learning outcomes are used. Student Activities has four

separate offices; programs office, community outreach office, student involvement, and the

leadership office. Under Christine's charge, each department spent about two years outlining

goals and topic areas of all of programs and services.

So, our department has a set of about 2 hundred learning outcomes that we've mapped

across our various programs and services (we have a very big student activities

department here). Um. And then, um…our student activities department has goals that

are informed by the priorities and the division's strategic plans. So the division has 5

strategic priorities and whenever our department meets once a year to um, you know,

wrap up our goals from the past year and develop our goals for the next year, we use

those priorities as the broad categories for the department goals.

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Learning outcomes were generated from the goals of each area that explained what each area intends for students to learn as a result of its activity. This action is in cooperation with what the literature explained should occur within Student Affairs divisions. Construct analysis was done at NEU on select learning outcomes by conducting focus groups from among student leaders and student employees. Christine found that the way that professionals and students term learning are different.

Resultant of the process SAAAC implemented from a divisional level, practitioners planning a training or workshop choose from the pre-existing list of learning outcomes before program implementation. There is also a question bank so that the unit has consistent assessment measures. Every learning outcome has a question for a participating student and a metric to accompany it. Each learning outcome is coded and every time that learning outcome shows up on an instrument, professionals are aware of which learning outcomes are affiliated with which programs. Participant interview data concerning learning outcomes planning at NEU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participant(s) revealed that learning outcomes measurement is new to the division
- Participant(s) shared that students referred to learning differently than Student Affairs educators
- Participant(s) discuss that NEU directly connects intended student learning with strategy

Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning Linkages at New England University

In attempt to recognize and address the diversity of units within the Division of Student Affairs at NEU, both service and learning outcomes are acceptable forms of measurement.

Metrics are used to quantify and measure whether a service has been granted, at what performance level, and if students have learned. As Daniel explained, "it [is] certainly perceivable as someone develops outcomes, they could develop a metric that was connected with student learning some way; that they wanted 80% of students who were in a program to achieve x numbers and they can track that as the metric". Learning outcomes are also systematic in the way that they are created and applied. Christine said,

> we've coded each learning outcome. So every time that learning outcome shows up on an instrument, we, well first of all we have a map – so we have this gigantic list of learning outcomes and we have this list of programs, so we know what learning outcomes go with what programs.

The division also has requirements for reporting assessment whereby units must define learning outcomes, assess them, and report results and then action steps they are going to take with that assessment. The action steps translate into unit level strategic planning. Two of the respondents described the process as a system that works to continuously improve itself as two or three components of student learning, assessment, and strategic planning connect. Daniel explained it as

> an ongoing kind of requirement for the departments to report on their strategic planning efforts, we try to have strategic planning reporting folded into the assessment planning so that really what people are reporting on their metrics, they are reporting on their strategic planning progress". The connection is continuous and deliberately overlapping.

Respondents indicated that NEU delivers a deliberate variety of measurement and connection approaches that include metrics connection to assessment, metrics connection to strategic planning, and metrics connection to student learning each build upon the other to construct an

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division that is ever cognizant of what students are learning. Daniel said, "we are asking departments to do one string of reporting that's really assessment reporting but they can connect that assessment reporting directly to the strategic plan and through the strategic plan priorities". Daniel also articulated the following.

> strategic metrics that are directly connected to our strategic plan or unit level metrics which really we encouraged and coached people to develop that reflect their own business needs, data is going to be either useful to them as bragging points or for decision making processes...

North Central University

Background and Structure

North Central University (NCU) is a public land-grant university located in the north central United States. Founded in 1870, NCU was established as a land-grant college under the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862. NCU is a *CampusLabs* affiliate. Situated on nearly 5,000 acres of land, the university dedicates 4,600 acres to research centers, State Forrest Service and Cooperative Extension offices (About NCU Page, 2013, p. 1). In a midsized metropolitan community of approximately 150,000 people, NCU considers itself the "university of choice" (p. 1) for state residents. Classified by the Carnegie Foundation (2013) as a research institution with very high research activity, NCU has a student population of approximately 29,500 (NCU Facts and Figures, 2012). Undergraduate students total 22,500 and graduate students total 3,600. Fifteen percent of the total student enrollment comprises U.S. students of color and 1,600 international students. NCU enrolls students across eight academic colleges. Accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Higher Learning Commission, NCU is nationally recognized for atmospheric science, construction management, environmental science,

and biomedical technology, and agriculture (About NCU, 2013). Adopted by the Board of

Governors for the state in 2010, the NCU mission statement is as follows:

Inspired by its land-grant heritage, NCU is committed to excellence, setting the standard

for public research universities in teaching, research, service and extension for the benefit

of the citizens of the state, the United States, and the world. (NCU Mission, 2010)

Student Affairs Division overview and division structure. NCU's mission statement

for the Division of Student Affairs states that

The division of Student Affairs fosters a campus community that supports students in the

development of their unique potential, inspiring them to be active learners, successful

graduates, and engaged global citizens. (NCU Division of Student Affairs Mission and

Strategic Goals 2013)

The organizational chart for the division reveals that the Vice President for Student

Affairs reports directly to the President of the University. Unlike other schools mentioned in this

study that refer to their areas as divisions, The Division of Student Affairs at NCU is organized

into eight clusters. Examples of clusters are the NCU Health Network, which comprises

Counseling Services, Health Education and Prevention, and Medical Services. Another Example

of a cluster is Campus Recreation which houses the Student Recreation Center, fitness and

activity classes, Intramural Sports, Sport Clubs, Outdoor Programs, and a Challenge Course.

Among all clusters there are forty-five units. Executive Directors, the Dean of Students, or

Assistant Vice Presidents supervise direct reports who in turn are charged with the responsibility

of guiding the work of units. Director-level leadership supervises units. Examples of the

division's units include the Center for Advising and Student Achievement, Student Diversity

Programs and Services (comprising cultural centers for underrepresented students such as

students with disabilities, Asian/Pacific Islander students, and Women).

Participants at NCU. Three participants from NCU were interviewed. Table 17 provides

additional participant characteristics.

Table 17

NCU Interview Respondent Characteristics

Participant	Position	Years at Institution	Unit in Student Affairs	Role in Assessment	Role in Strategic Planning
1	Student Affairs Vice President	27	All - Student Affairs	Division Guidance/ Champion	Division Guidance/ Champion
2	Director of Assessment	9	N/A – In academic Affairs	Procures, Designs & Delivers Data of Division & Institutional Assessment Databases	No Direct Role
3	Parenting and Family Programs Director	5	Parenting and Family Programs	Data Collection Serves on Assessment and research steering committee	Data Collection

Betty. Betty has served as the Vice President for student affairs at NCU for 27 years.

When asked to speak about her roles in Student Affairs Assessment, Strategic Planning or both

she stated the following.

So, as the division, VP, a…the first thing I did when I took on this role was to get Dee M.

here to be my assessment and research person. Because, recognizing how important that

role is, in terms of a…just running a division, and knowing what we're doing and why

we're doing it, and if we're successful at it. And being able to articulate to other people

what we do and why we do it, and how we do it. So my role is simply to, um…I guess,

set a vision for the division and to actually have somebody who could then follow up

with working with the division in terms of looking at our assessment and our strategic

goals and strategic planning.

Kim. Kim is Director of Assessment. He works in the Provost Office, which is in an

academic area, and he reports to the Provost and Executive Vice President. When Kim was asked

to describe his role in Student Assessment or Strategic Planning as an Academic Affairs affiliate,

he stated the following:

I developed an in house continuous improvement system; interactive database for

planning and evaluation. And we have…We have all over our assessment planning for

171 programs online and we also do all of our entire program review online for 54

departments. We also a…where Student Affairs comes in, is I work directly with Dee. I

sit on his steering committee ah…that he has for student affairs. And I developed for

them an assessment planning area for them to use. So, they…each of their units also have

annual assessment plans that they keep up/a…maintain every year. Also, I am building

right now another template for them to use program review. They've been using it online

for about 2 years moving um…we're moving to a new template.

Kacee. Kacee serves as the Parenting and Family Programs Director and has been at the

institution for 5 years. In describing her role in Student Assessment or Strategic Planning, Kacee

mentioned the following:

I sit on the um…Assessment and research steering committee for the division of Student

Affairs, um…so really helping Dee who's our Executive Director of Research and

Assessment for the division. Um…Really just helping him um…with all our, our

projects, all our um…kind of, you know, five-year plans all of our um…annual reporting

documents. Um. In many cases, I tend to be the gatherer of information for the campus

wide cluster that (supervisor) oversees. Um…And I prepare most of the um…assessment

information for Parent and Family Program.

Assessment in Student Affairs at North Central University

At NCU, the Vice-President works closely with the Director of Research and Assessment

for Student Affairs who is located physically in the Vice President of Student Affairs office. This

individual is present at management team meetings and participates as senior-level leadership

within the division and across the university. In 2011 the division worked collectively to develop

a presentation using assessment data from commercially developed survey instruments, NCU

institutional data, and other unit-level instruments used to assess from year to year. Senior level

leadership, including the Vice President leveraged this presentation to speak with faculty,

administrators, students, and others internal and external to campus community. The presentation

introduces the results of assessment data to various audiences while talking about what NCU

professionals know about today's college student. Although the presentation is about student

demographics, attitudes and behaviors, it is also about student learning.

NCU also has an assessment-reporting website called PRISM. Both academic and student

affairs divisions access this online system to update assessment plans, update results from the

previous year, and for program review. When Kacee was asked to describe assessment in student

affairs different she articulated:

We do assessment on a regular basis. Um…We assess parents and families on really

anything that we can think of. Um and we do that um… through surveys, um we do a bi-

annual survey that assesses all of our programs. We do. Um…Annual surveys about

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our…our parent and family association, um so do kind of the online survey piece. We have parent and family association meetings so we use kind of um, a… a small group model to solicit feedback from family members um…and kind of individual through conversations, emails, those kinds of things with families. Um…So, we do that ongoing, in terms of strategic planning, um, I think we. Um…in terms of strategic planning, um…it tends to be more of a - an annual process, so while we're assessing regularly, we're strategizing on a, on an annual basis.

When Kim was asked about how an assessment operates in the division of Student Affairs, he stated:

I think ah - they have about 36 plans now that are operating. They have - their organized in clusters: Ah - academic Support (and – you know, I'm just not as familiar as Dee is, of course). But, they have about 5 clusters: Housing, ah, Dining, ah, Student Center, um…Health System Services (those kinds of things). And then within those – ah, kind of department like areas they have sub-programs in front of those program assessment plan. And um, they ah…have usually about 3 outcomes that are service related but now, the Student Affairs division here has kind of mandated to all units to develop 2 new outcomes. Well one has to be a student development learning outcome, probably based on the CAS standards. And has to develop a diversity outcome. So, they have to have at least one diversity outcome and a least one student development learning outcome among their service outcomes. We code those different in our planning and color them different so they are pretty distinguished from one another. Ah. Um..It's all directed mostly from the ARSC Committee – I'm trying to remember what that means. I think it's Assessment Research Steering committee – I believe that's it. They oversee processes and ah… they

tell me what they want the plans to look like; the templates and so forth. Those plans are

reviewed every year by staff. Student Affair staff and they also have programs reviews

online that are reviewed every year. I think that's on a 5-year cycle, program reviews.

Ah. I think they split them up ah…probably about 5 each year or so – 5 or 6 each year

until they get up to 30 – 30 ah, units.

Participant interview data relating to assessment at NCU can be summarized in these points.

- Participant(s) indicated that the division leveraged data as a outreach tool

- Participant(s) shared that an assessment reporting website is used to create, maintain

  data

- Participant(s) revealed that reporting one diversity and student development outcome
  per

  unit is mandatory

Strategic Planning in Student Affairs at North Central University

A strategic plan for the institution and for the Division of Student Affairs were found on

the NCU website. NCU's strategic plan for the university is divided into six major areas with

committee representation for each. Areas include teaching and learning, resources, discovery and

research, faculty and staff development, diversity, and external relations. Activities conducted

within the Division of Student Affairs fall within the teaching and learning area. The Vice

President of Student Affairs serves on the teaching and learning committee for the university.

There are strategic goals that are specifically assigned to the Vice President of Student Affairs as

per her role on the committee. Some goals are her direct responsibility whereas others are shared

with other divisions that share responsibilities within the teaching and learning area.

The Executive Director of Research and Assessment for the Division of Student Affairs,

who reports to the Vice President, scripted the divisional strategic plan, which includes the

mission statement, NCU's brand promise, strategic goals, and other information and direction for those conducting strategic planning within the division. The major goals of the Division of Student Affairs Strategic Plan are as follows:

1. Ensure excellence in academic programs

2. Create distinctive undergraduate experiences

3. Expose students to diverse cultures

4. Integrate academic and co-curricular experiences

5. Provide quality venues and related services that support learning

These goals are part of the university-wide strategic plan under the teaching and learning construct. Each respondent believed that the division strategically connects unit-level and division-level goals to institutional goals. Betty pointed out that, "…within every unit, there is an expectation then, a…that they a…that they have a strategic plan for their unit. That their strategic plan is tied into the division's strategic plan". Another respondent commented on deliberate strategic connection,

> Our division's strategic plan responds to the university's strategic plan. So, the overall University has what they call SPARC committees: um…strategic programs, assessment, committees. And so that's all set by the institution, and then, um…within the division we determine where we fit within the institution's um… SPARC goals, so our goals primarily report or respond to the um, teaching and learning section.

The SPARC committee operationalizes divisional strategic plans. The group is split into different subcommittees whose membership includes faculty, students and staff from both academic and student affairs. When asked about how strategic planning operates within the division, Kim explained committee duties:

So we have those committees visiting our strategic plan every year. Um. Um. Those

individuals/representatives take that back to their units and (by word of mouth at least)

they are spreading um. Ah. what is going on with strategic planning.

More specifically, the contribution of committees to the strategic planning process in the division

is one that is heavily used by divisional leadership to move the work of strategic planning

forward. Betty informed, "On this particular research committee, research and assessment

committee, every cluster is represented. And a…and Charles [Executive Director of Research

and Assessment] uses that group as his advisory committee, and also as a, um, as a working

committee". As Director of Assessment for Academic Affairs, Kim serves on Charles's

committee as an academic affairs partner who is instrumental to building assessment and

program review templates. Kim commented that, "where Student Affairs comes in, is I work

directly with Charles. I sit on his steering committee ah…that he has for student affairs". Kim

also is a committee chair. He said,

members on the committee that I chair for um, academic program and evaluation counsel,

those are associate deans. So they have pretty close contact with strategic planning

process as well. And again remember, we embed the strategic plan in our assessment

plans

Kacee explained how this steering committee works to further the strategic planning effort of

divisional leadership,

There is a committee – um…a, the assessment and research steering committee comes

together. And we sort of um…um, look at it as a whole. Um…But from an operational

perspective, we get together in that steering committee meeting um…and kind of make a

plan for… Here's how we going to collect all the data, here is how we going to review all

the data, make sure that um…kind of it comes together and makes sense, and pair each

other up to um review the information make sure it matches goals that have been set out

by the division.

Kacee further explained the composition of this committee.

The strategic assessment and research steering committee- SARSC. Um. Is it's made up

of a different levels of people from different size units, so it is a combination of a

pretty…um middle management um directors, assistant directors, to um classified staff.

Annual reports housed on the NCU Student Affairs website are based on the university's

strategic plan. Each annual report is reported in the five different strategic planning categories

listed above that are reflective of university goals and strategies. Student Affairs units who have

posted to the site are situated under the university strategic planning construct of teaching and

learning. Online annual reports showcased programmatic efforts according to strategic planning

categories. The annual reporting indicated that the university's strategic plan and the Division of

Student Affairs Strategic Plan guide unit-level efforts. Participant interview data concerning

strategic planning at NCU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participant(s) shared that there are committees with subcommittees that is responsible
  for divisional strategic planning. (SPARC and Strategic Planning committee)

- Participant(s) indicate that strategic planning activity of the division falls under a
  broad institutional goal (teaching and learning).

- Participant(s) indicate that strategic planning is annual (whereas assessment is
  ongoing)

- Participant(s) revealed assessment and strategic planning are inclusive of each other

Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs at North Central University

The PRISM online assessment system operates at NCU as a non-standardized database for research collaboration. Kim informed, "We use our online system program review and assessment also as an organizational learning and environment tool". The database is shared with other universities who, like NCU, co-construct the database for usage. PRISM is used at participating institutions to maintain and understand how continuous change management evolves within and across each institution. PRISM is used at the division level. At the time of interviewing, NCU had 36 plans in operation that were organized into five clusters. PRISM allows institutional decision makers to maintain the integrity and the individual values of each unit. For example, just as the department of history has different values than the department of chemistry, in student affairs the Career Center will have different values than the Student Financial Aid area. As an evaluation system to determine how well something was done and as an assessment system to measure whether a unit process was done as intended, PRISM can relate collective and individual unit values across the division.

NCU is listed on the National Institute for Student Learning Outcomes (NILOA) website as a best practice institution. As an academic affairs affiliate, Kim works closely with student affairs personnel by serving on committees, and assisting senior student affairs officers. Such close inter-division affiliation is one of the reasons that NCU has earned such a distinction. Another one of those reasons is due to the mandatory reporting that is aligned with divisional values. The Student Affairs division at NCU mandates all units to develop two outcomes among their service outcomes. One must be a student learning outcome based on the CAS standards. And the other has to be a diversity outcome. Some institutions in this study distinguish a learning outcome and a service outcome as different, NCU considered learning and diversity outcomes to

apply as a service outcome. Betty, the Vice President of Student Affairs stated, "…we really are trying to move into a…learning outcome…um…philosophy. So, that when people are writing their goals, they'll write um in a learning outcome um…mode". Kacee reinforced that the division communicates that learning outcomes are important by saying "we are encouraged to learn about learning outcomes".

In the PRISM online assessment system, each outcome is coded differently in the plan so they are distinguished from one another, illustrating what learning is generated and intended across the division, in each unit. The Assessment Research Steering committee oversees the implementation and primarily virtual review processes from templates design, coordination of annual review by divisional staff, and a 5-year cycle review by division staff holding committee membership. Kacee explained that it is important for all professionals in the division to know how to design and implement learning outcomes.

> …this Fall Kay and I will be helping our housing, or our residence life office develop learning outcomes for all their programs, and the director of residence life is adamant that um, that everyone from you know, Graduate assistant all the way up to to Assistant Directors will be there and be you know, be participating in the process of creating these learning outcomes. So that everyone has a sense of a…where we're going, and a say in kind of where we're going and, and learning outcomes would look like?

Betty was clear about why measuring student learning was important. Comments rested on the concept of transferable skills that students will need, growth opportunities, and connection from in-class activity to learning from activity outside of the classroom.

> These are all skills that I'm gonna need no matter what I major in a…no matter what job I go into. These are skills that I can take with me for, you know, for the rest of my life.

And so it's really having people look beyond their immediate need. Um…to how does what you do really impact the learning and the growth of students more broadly. So that's a challenge for some people.

Betty also noted that service areas within the division find it difficult to create learning outcomes.

And how is it impacting student learning? And, you know, for some units within out division, that's easy, they're about retention. they're about um…um…It's easier for them to think in terms of student learning. For other units within the division, that's a bit of a challenge, because, um…you know, we have some units, particularly in our auxiliary areas. Like our bookstore, for example, or dining, where, you know, they're a little bit challenged to say. You know, we don't really see um…our main objectives, our main goals its not necessarily about student learning, its about service.

Participant interview data concerning learning outcomes planning at NCU can be summarized as follows.

- Participant(s) described PRISM as a continuous change management system that evolves according to the values of each unit.

- Participant(s) informed that each unit builds learning outcomes to adhere to the divisional strategic plan, which, in turn adheres to the university strategic plan.

- Participant(s) shared that in tandem with the university mission, and the division mission, all units are required to align student learning outcomes with the institution and division consider importance – outcomes must be (1) diversity, (2) service, and (3) a student learning outcome

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Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning Linkages at North Central University

Two of the three respondents from NCU discussed the importance of connecting the mission to learning. One respondent queried, "How does everything tie back to the institutional mission?" The Vice President of Student Affairs at NCU explained,

But the questions that I ask is so what is the purpose of this activity that you're doing. And how does it fit the learning outcomes that you have put and the goals and mission of your…of the university, of the division, and of your unit. And, how do you know that it's reaching…achieving the goals that you have set? How are you assessing that?

Another respondent said, "Division assessment goals hold us accountable for the division strategic goals. So, I think it a, it enhances student learning because we're being held accountable to do it".

When asked to pontificate about linkages of assessment, student learning, and strategic planning, each respondent, in some guise posed questions aloud that synthesized into three themed questions (1) how do I know what I know, (2) where did I learn it, (3) who does it serve? For example, Betty reflected this question, "What information are we gathering as an institution that would be helpful for us to know as we're planning programs and setting policy". Kacee reflected, "the management team coming up to us to see what are goals? And how do they relate to your goals? So um, you know, how are we positioning the division to support the institution around student learning"? In order to make connections, self-questioning was self-imposed during each respondent interview. For example, Kacee asked, "And so we'll then review that research via the assessment and we'll see, did we hit? Did the people take home what we

actually wanted them to take home? Or did we completely miss it"? Betty followed a cathartic line of questioning to make her point about how unit level process relates to student learning.

> Then at the end of the year, when they have to do they're annual report, they go back to that and then they say, okay, this is what you said you were gonna do, why you were gonna do it, this is what you were hoping a learning outcome would be. This is how you said you were gonna assess it. Did you assess it? What did you find out? And based on that, what are you going to either do in the future to tweak that, to change the objective, to maybe not do it that way anymore. We want it to reach the goal that we want. Students felt like they got out of it what we wanted them to get out of it and so we'll continue to do it again next year. But they have to go through that process. And so that way, we directly tie into what they say they're gonna do and why they're doing it.

Participant interview data: Linkages at NCU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participant(s) asked questions aloud to conceptualize and explain linkages
- Participant(s) suggested that the divisional process allows units to report on what kind of assessments are being used and to develop reports on what kinds of student learning is being measured or assessed

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Northwest Commission University

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Background and Structure

Northwest Commission University (NWCU) is a land-grant university located in the northwest region of the United States. Founded in 1868, NWCU became a land-grant institution after the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862. NWCU is one of the few U.S. institutions to also have a sea, space, and sun grant designations. NWCU is a *CampusLabs* affiliate. NWCU's 400-acre main campus is located in a college town of 55,000. Classified by the Carnegie Foundation

(2013) as a research institution with very high research activity, the university has an approximate 26,393 students; of those, 2,362 are international students. NWCU has 200 undergraduate degree programs and 80 graduate degree programs. Accredited by the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities, NWCU attracts students to its nationally recognized programs in areas such as nuclear engineering, pharmacy, agricultural sciences, and biology. The NWCU mission statement states the following:

> As a land grant institution committed to teaching, research, and outreach and engagement, NWCU promotes economic, social, cultural and environmental progress for the people of the state, the nation and the world. This mission is achieved by producing graduates competitive in the global economy, supporting a continuous search for new knowledge and solutions, and maintaining a rigorous focus on academic excellence, particularly in the three Signature Areas: Advancing the Science of Sustainable Earth Ecosystems; Improving Human Health and Wellness; and Promoting Economic Growth and Social Progress. (NWCU Mission, 2013)

Student Affairs Division overview and division structure. NWCU's mission statement for the Division of Student Affairs juxtaposes the division's fundamental goals of accountability, diversity, integrity, respect, and social responsibility. In part, the Mission and Fundamental goals statement reads as thus:

> NWCU prepares talented young people from all backgrounds to be leaders and productive members of our society by helping them become critical thinkers, global citizens and skilled professionals. (NWCU Strategic Plan, 2013)

The main webpage for the division reveals that the "Vice Provost for Student Affairs reports to the Provost/Executive Vice President and serves as a member of the executive leadership team of

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the president" (NWCU Vice Provost for Student Affairs webpage, p.1). The page goes on to say that

> A significant dimension of the vice provost position involves developing relationships
> and creating connections that will enhance the quality of life for students. The vice
> provost has responsibility for working with students, faculty, staff and other stakeholders
> to promote the development of a positive campus environment. Because of the wide
> diversity among the units within Student Affairs, the vice provost is expected to provide
> leadership to ensure coherence and congruence among the various services and
> initiatives, ensuring that efforts are strategically aligned and mission focused. (p. 2)

The Division of Student Affairs comprises nineteen units. The Vice Provost supervises nineteen Director-level direct reports who in turn are charged with the responsibility of guiding the work of each unit. Examples of the division's units include Admissions, Student Conduct and Community Standards and Enrollment Management.

Participants at NWCU. Three participants from NWCU were interviewed. Table 18 provides additional participant characteristics.

Patricia. Patricia has served as the Director of Student Health Services for 11 years. For nine of those 11 years, she has served on the student affairs assessment council in the role of co-representative from Student Health Services to that committee. She also served on the Student Affairs Leadership Team, also called SALT, and has been involved in the student affairs strategic planning through SALT.

Mary. Mary has served as the Director of Student Leadership and Involvement for over 20 years. As the representative from her department, Mary also holds a seat on the student affairs

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assessment council. Part of her responsibility as a departmental representative to the assessment council is to lead the assessment efforts in her department.

   Becca. Becca is the Director of Student Affairs Research Evaluation and Planning. Her primary role is to facilitate a culture of assessment and continuous improvement for the student affairs division. In addition to administering the NSSE, the BSSE and other commercial surveys, Becca reports information to senior leadership and various campus constituencies.

Table 18

NWCU Interview Respondent Characteristics

Participant	Position	Years at Institution	Unit in Student Affairs	Role in Assessment	Role in Strategic Planning
1	Student health services Director	11	Student Health/Student Affairs	Simultaneously Co-chair the assessment team for student health services and strategically plans as a member of the Student Affairs Leadership Team (SALT)	SALT
2	Student Leadership and Involvement Director	20	Student Leadership and Involvement	Lead unit assessment efforts	Participant in one of the seven different strategic planning initiatives
3	Student affairs Research, Evaluation and Planning Director	18	Research, Evaluation and Planning	Facilitate a culture of assessment and continuous improvement	Coordinate Effort

Assessment in Student Affairs at Northwest Commission University

The Division of Student Affairs at NWCU began work a decade ago to organize assessment of programs and services. The Assessment Council grew from the collective work and organizing between academic and student affairs. Teams of professionals from various academic and student affairs departments now work to educate themselves and colleagues about assessment. Each Student Affairs department submits an annual report and assessment plan.

The assessment council is representative of each unit with one to two representatives from each unit serving on the council. The Assessment Council annually submits assessment reports and plans for the coming year. Reports and plans are submitted to the Director of Research and Evaluation for review and then it is submitted to the Vice Provost for Student Affairs. Assessment Council members also review up to two other assessment plans and reports from units other than their own prior to submission to the Director of Research and Evaluation. Pat explained the following:

> As a member of the assessment team, we also review each other's assessment plans and reports and get feedback on an annual basis. As a committee member, we review about two of those, um…unit assessment plans a year.

The Assessment Council sets the format, structure, annual submission deadlines, and reviews each assessment plan submitted from within the division.

After assessment plan review, the Assessment Council provides assistance and suggestions for each department on how to collect or best use the information reported. When Pat was asked to paint a picture of how assessment operates in the division, she answered

> so each um…unit has a representative or two to the assessment council. We submit on an annual basis, an assessment, um…report, and then a plan for the coming year. That report

goes to Peter who's the director of research and evaluation for us and then its…then it goes to Janice who is our Vice Provost for Student Affairs. um…so that's on a …on an annual basis.

As other universities in this study, the NWCU assessment process enlists assistance from an assessment council comprised of divisional representatives from each unit, is decentralized as a unit specific model, and has senior student affairs officer leadership guiding the work of the divisional assessment body. A synthesis of data indicated that the key functions of the assessment council at NWCU are as follows:

- Educate the Assessment Council membership and others through activities of professional development such as trainings and workshops

- Manage anxiety that may be caused by required assessment activity

- Make assessment standards

- Consult departments

- Assess the committees influence of creating an assessment culture

Responsibility for assessment within student affairs falls not only to the assessment committee, the Director of Research and Evaluation, but also to Student Affairs Research and Evaluation (SARE), and finally the division's departments. Participant interview data concerning assessment at NWCU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participant(s) shared that academic and student affairs both have a role in divisional assessment

- Participant(s) annual assessment reports and annual assessment plans are completed by each unit

- Participant(s) annual assessment reports and annual assessment plans are reviewed by the Assessment Council and then by the Director of Research and Evaluation

- Participant(s) revealed assessment as decentralized and controlled at the unit level

Strategic Planning in Student Affairs at Northwest Commission University

Using data to strategically inform decisions remains a challenge because the Division of Student Affairs at NWCU has a recent history of strategic planning. In the last two years, divisional strategic planning has been developed under the authority of the Vice Provost. Melissa explained the following:

> I mentioned earlier that we are in a process of doing some strategic planning, and mm I've been at university for over 20 years and I frankly don… not remember another time where there was such a comprehensive approach toward strategic planning in Student Affairs, in the division.

Becca also commented on the division's recent strategic planning efforts:

> Well, since I've been here it is the first formal strategic planning effort by the division. And I think several things have prompted it. But, we are handling it like we handle a lot of things. We called a meeting of the division and anybody who could come, came. And we began talking about the need for a strategic plan; that the conditions were right and that this one is going to be another one of those opportunities where those people who have the energy, the commitment, etc. to participate will determine the course of our division. And so we did that; we sent out a call for people and people volunteered and then we had a process of getting a steering committee together. And the steering committee's job was to begin collect information and ideas from all the members of our division.

Each respondent consistently expressed that strategic planning is informed by assessment plans. During the time of interviews, the division had within the last three months newly completed finalizing a divisional strategic planning document. The Student Affairs Leadership Team (SALT) spent two retreat days during the previous summer fleshing out the strategic plan for student affairs. Pat admitted, "this is the first time that I can remember that we've done it with such breath". Previous to the charge being put to the SALT team, a sub group had worked to create the document foundation. Following that work is when the SALT group assembled to create a usable document. The document includes strategic initiatives that are built upon the university's strategic plan. The strategic initiatives include the following.

1. Creating environments that strengthen holistic personal development and well being of students,

2. Cultivating a positive, inclusive, and engaging campus community where multiple aspects are openly shared and can thrive,

3. Being a teaching and learning organization.

4. Enhance our own knowledge and the knowledge of others.

5. Develop global citizens who are prepared and empowered to make meaningful contributions that are socially relevant.

6. Establish a sustained necessary resources to enhance division priorities

Participation from practitioners within the division in the strategic planning process is voluntary. Melissa informed that, "In each initiative we asked for volunteers". She went onto say "go with the energy and to involve the people who want to be involved rather than forcing them to be. So, that's what we are doing. Putting the call out there and get the people that want to be involved". Pat confirmed Melissa's comments by stating,

And we don't do a lot of appointment. I think one of the philosophies on this…on this

campus is, is we go where the energy is. And, um…so, for…I think an example of that is,

within the assessment council, um…people have typically not been appointed, but they

have volunteered.

Regardless of position any professional within the division can be involved may contribute by

serving on any of the strategic initiative committees. Becca explained,

And what those leaders do is they make sure the groups convene and they facilitate the

conversations and they document decisions that are made or issues that need to be

furthered discussed or whatever. All levels of the division are involved from the graduate

student in (higher education doctorate program) who has a graduate assistantship in

admissions through could be secretarial staff through department heads. All levels of

division it was an open invitation and anyone who wants to work on it can come and

work on it. There's not a hierarchy in terms of who's allowed to be involved. If that

makes sense. Nor, is there any hierarchy in terms of who can be the group leader

facilitator. It comes from the whole idea that there are positional leaders and there are

leader leaders. And sometimes the leader leaders are in a positional leadership but can do

marvelous leadership work. So that's kind of a basic philosophy of our division and truth.

Participant interview data concerning strategic planning at NWCU can be summarized in the

following points.

- Participant(s) indicated that the operation of the strategic initiatives can be activated

  by any volunteer within the division

- Participant(s) revealed that the strategic initiatives are created by division-appointed

  leadership

- Participant(s) identified strategic initiatives are carried out by unit, according to the directive of each strategic initiative committee

- Participant(s) shared that assessment plans have a role in divisional strategy planning

- Participant(s) informed that strategic planning has only recently been formalized in the Student Affairs division

- Participant(s) communicated that the division's strategic plans were built on strategic initiatives

- Participant(s) indicate that the most recent strategic planning was the most robust in the history of the division

Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs at Northwest Commission University

Each unit receives the responsibility from the Assessment Council to develop an annual assessment report and the plans that will support student learning assessment. Both assessment reports and plans include learning outcomes. Larger units develop teams while smaller units use one point person in the unit, and others utilize the entire staff to generate the assessment report. The method of completion is at the discretion of each unit. With a range of skill and experience in composing learning outcomes being a challenge, the Assessment Council offered practitioners training and practice to help individuals understand, write, and measure student learning outcomes wherein the varied understanding became apparent. Some units have stronger skill sets than others, reflecting in the strength or weakness of the learning outcomes composed by a particular area. The Assessment Council also sets an expectation for units to produce assessment plans and reports in a particular format. Learning outcomes may vary within those plans dependent upon the mission, vision, and needs of a unit or a program within it. Participant interview data concerning learning outcomes planning at NWCU can be summarized as follows.

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- Participant(s) revealed that departments may create more robust student learning outcomes dependent upon the experience among professionals within each unit
- Participant(s) shared that the process is decentralized

Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning Linkages at Northwest Commission University

The person in the divisional assessment role appointed by the Vice Provost for Student Affairs is responsible for connecting the Assessment Council activity and the strategic planning process while the Vice Provost for Student Affairs facilitates construction and operation of the strategic plan through SARE and SALT-led projects within the division. Beside the divisional assessment role of SARE and SALT committees appointed by the Vice Provost for Student Affairs, no other roles are earmarked in the division to connect strategic planning and assessment. The division relies on volunteers from each unit to organically arise from the call to committee after the strategic plan is shared each year. Pat explained, "people have typically not been appointed, but they have volunteered".

As volunteer representatives participate from each unit, activity from each unit becomes known and connected by volunteer representatives during committee meetings within their respective units. Information stems from committees that operationalize the strategic plan, and the blueprinting to connect and operationalize the strategic plan to unit-level assessment is translated back to each unit by volunteer representatives. Pat also shared

And as a division, this strategic plan is shared at division meeting. And those people that have the energy and want to work on any of the strategic initiatives are welcomed into the process, um…to work on that and then there's a point person too, for each of the

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initiatives, and then that those subgroups from the broader division of student affairs, will come together and really craft the implementation of those initiatives.

Respondents mentioned intentionality of links among and within committees, units, and individuals as important to creating divisional solidarity and student learning. For example, one respondent reported that the methods used by appointed volunteer representatives sets expectations within the division and includes

the decision making; the implementation; the evaluation; the review of everything assessment within the division. So they're the people that decide on what the reports need to contain; how often the departments need to submit them; how they're submitted. They're the ones that review all the reports and provide direct feedback to the units. Um, they're the ones that develop the rubrics that we use to evaluate assessment plans and reports. So, they really are the sort of policy making; implementation team I guess is how I might describe them.

Another respondent stated, "The strategic planning um…is informed by…in many ways, by our assessment plans."

During interview sessions, when asked to speak to linkages of assessment, student learning, and strategic planning, respondents, posed questions aloud that synthesized into three themed questions (1) how do I know what I know, (2) where did I learn it, (3) who does it serve? Mary said,

I think we need to look at those multiple layers of the assessment, so you know when I said that we are starting to take a more comprehensive approach where doing learning outcomes is also looking at scope, scale and efficiency, so who are serving? How do we know that is working?

Becca also inquired aloud as to the purpose of linking effort to student learning.

> Well, I think when you can start out thinking about what do you want students to gain from your efforts? What do you want them to learn? What do you want them to be able to do? What habits of mind do you want them to utilize in their life as a student and beyond? If you start thinking that way it's like okay what do I have to do to get the student from A to B. You know, what structures need to be in place? What programs need to be in place? What staffing levels?

Southern University

Background and Structure

Southern University (SU) has a land, sea, and space-grant designation and is located in the southern region of the United States. Founded in 1853, SU was recognized a land-grant institution after the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862. SU is a *CampusLabs* affiliate. SU is situated on a 2000-acre campus and is classified by the Carnegie Foundation (2013) as a research institution with very high research activity. The Carnegie Foundation (2013) recognizes SU has having 50,691 students. Accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, SU boasts nationally recognized programs in medicine and pharmacy. According to the SU mission statement, the institution

> must create the broadly diverse environment necessary to foster multi-cultural skills and perspectives in its teaching and research for its students to contribute and succeed in the world of the 21st century. These three interlocking elements — teaching, research and scholarship, and service — span all the university's academic disciplines and represent the university's commitment to lead and serve the state, the nation and the world by pursuing and disseminating new knowledge while building upon the experiences of the

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past. The university aspires to advance by strengthening the human condition and improving the quality of life. (SU President's Webpage, 2013)

Student Affairs Division overview and division structure. SU's mission statement for the Division of Student Affairs states

Student Affairs actively contributes to the university's academic mission, provides comprehensive student services, and educates all SU students. Student Affairs enriches student learning through leadership, service, engagement, and self-discovery resulting in a well-qualified, healthy, and broadly diverse citizenry and workforce. (SU Division of Students webpage, 2013)

The organizational chart for the division reveals that the Interim Vice President for Student Affairs reports directly to the President of the University. The Division of Student Affairs comprises six areas, each housing specialty units. The Vice President for Student Affairs supervises 6 direct reports who in turn are charged with the responsibility of guiding the work of two or more units. Direct reports to the Vice President for Student Affairs include two Associate Vice-Presidents, two Assistant Vice Presidents, and two Director-level roles. Examples of the division's units include Housing and Residence Education, Marketing and Communications, and Multicultural and Diversity Affairs.

Participants at SU. Three participants from SU were interviewed. Table 19 provides additional participant characteristics.

Pat. Pat is the Coordinator for Administrative Services and Assessment in the Department of Recreational Sports within the Division of Student Affairs. Prior to assuming the position, Pat completed two years as a graduate assistant in the department. She has been in her current role six and one half years. She oversees the administration of all divisional assessments,

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provides statistical information about program usage and satisfaction, and uses the assessment results to help guide the development of the divisional strategic plan.

Jenae. Jenae has worked as the Assistant Vice president for Student Affairs for 15 years. Janae leads the division-wide assessment committee that implements training and shares information. She collects annual assessment reports, and serves as the liaison for the division to accreditation officials.

Holly. Holly has been with SU for eight years. Holly first served as the Interim Director of the career resource center and seven months later was offered the permanent position. She held another position on campus prior to becoming director. For four years, she has been involved in the divisional assessment committee as a unit representative of her area. She also is also involved in the divisional strategic planning committee in the same capacity.

Table 19

SU Interview Respondent Characteristics

Participant	Position	Years at Institution	Unit in Student Affairs	Role in Assessment	Role in Strategic Planning
1	Coordinator for administrative services in the department of recreational sports	6 1/2	Recreational sports	Oversee Administration of Unit level assessments. Administer division-wide training and in-service.	Administer division-wide training and in-service.
2	Assistant Vice president for Student Affairs	15	Divisional leadership	Lead assessment activities for the division	Lead strategic planning activities for the division
3	Director of the career resource center	8	career resource center	Serves on divisional assessment committee	Serves on divisional strategic planning committee

Assessment in Student Affairs at Southern University

SU organizes divisional assessment at the division level and administers operation of assessment at the unit level whereby representatives from each unit serve on a division-wide assessment committee. The assessment process for the division is in the care of the assessment committee and its subcommittees, who either volunteer or are recommended by colleagues. Ultimately the Vice President of Student Affairs appoints committee members. Serving as the Assistant Vice President for Student Affairs, Janae is directly involved in recommending committee members to the Vice President. She said,

> I had asked all of the directors to appoint somebody. And they did. And um…The mistake I made was um. They put everybody in there that didn't really want to be doing it. So I um…so what I did. I was kinda laughing because. We kicked everybody off the committee and I started over. And I um…I gotta laugh, but I really shouldn't laugh…and I hand picked people that I know would not be difficult. And they did. And now I have all good people.

Functions of the assessment committee are to guide the work of assessment within the division, administer training and in-services across the entire division, and help to guide the work of the division's strategic plan. Pat identified the major goals for assessment as "reporting, training and collaboration". The function of reporting as explained by her is to "help each department within the division reduce report about the information they're collecting and to be able to publish and share that information with stakeholders". Pat leads the training subcommittee. According to her, the goal of training is to "provide in-service training at a both kind of a beginner level and an advanced level to people – to all members of the division and typically people who work with assessment".

The SU student affairs division conducts several internal professional development opportunities for practitioners to stay current with assessment practices and to network with others interested in assessment in and outside of the division. One example is the Assessment Boot camp that is a full day workshop once per year. In its third year, the workshop offers a full day of sessions that are striated into a beginner and advanced track. Since all practitioners arrive to the division with identical skills working with assessment, the committee also hosts two webinars per semester through CampusLabs for the entire division. Although the webinars are accessible anytime to all professionals within the division due to the licensing allowances, respondents reported that hosting webinars for the entire division draw more participants than requesting that colleagues view webinars on their own. The assessment committee also hosts an Assessment Symposium in Spring as an opportunity for professionals within the division to showcase and share work done with assessment. One respondent suggested that CampusLabs webinars and the Spring symposium are "creating partnerships among areas that are collecting similar information".

From 2009 to 2011, assessment at the department level was gathered and used only to gauge student satisfaction. In refining the way that information is gathered and used, departments began to collect information about satisfaction, facility usage, and programs. Every two years SU collects information campus-wide about student satisfaction and other student attitudes by implementing a national survey developed by the NASPA Consortium and the National Intramural Recreational Sports Association to gauge student satisfaction with programs, services, and facilities. SU has refined their practices and have moved from collecting student satisfaction and counting the amount of participants to collecting more quantitative data on behavioral, usage

and other data. Participant interview data of assessment at SU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participants indicated that assessment is decentralized by unit

- Participants expressed importance of moving beyond assessing student satisfaction and usage

- Participants communicated that the division has an assessment committee and subcommittees

Strategic Planning in Student Affairs at Southern University

Strategic Planning in Student Affairs at SU focuses on five key strategic areas or KSA's. Those areas include student learning and engagement, global understanding and diversity, service delivery, communication and collaboration, and resources which are defined as people, finances, technology and facilities. There is a committee for each KSA that is charged with working with each unit to operationalize the strategic plan. In the last year, each unit has begun work to reduce the amount of reporting so that assessment is not merely data collection, but that it is strategically being communicated across the division for various audiences so as to increase visibility of unit level work at the division level.

As SU has refined their assessment practices and have moved from collecting student satisfaction and counting the amount of participants to collecting more quantitative data on behavior, usage and other data, professionals can now identify more about their demographics and understand where voids in service and learning experiences exist. Thereafter, professionals can move forward with correcting service voids. Jenae expressed that divisional leadership has been able to rely on colleagues appointed to committees in order to locate voids.

one of the big things that we heard from the staff was one of the things missing in the old strategic plan was service delivery was not one of the key strategic areas. And everybody said, you're missing something. And she said, well that's not about student affairs. And we're like, but we do service delivery.

When asked to describe how strategic planning operates within the division, Jenae stated the following:

The way it works – is um when we recently re did the strategic plan in 2010, um…we did um very large process with representatives with throughout the division. Um. And what we did is we updated the mission statement, we updated our vision, our key strategic areas, our um…just overall framework using everybody's input as well as we also did a stakeholder survey from outside of the division of student affairs as well as within the division of student affairs. Um, we even changed our tagline as a result of the feedback we'd got.

In the 2011 through 2015 strategic plan, KSA's are defined and have goals associated with them. In compliance with the divisional expectation, each departmental strategic plan should include a learning outcome and a programmatic outcome. In order to maintain relevancy to department and division work, each department chooses two or three goals or strategic areas to highlight update and discuss every two weeks. The information is captured on what are called dashboards to show progression across the semester. Results submitted to the dashboard are discussed at the bi-weekly meeting as the Vice President Council meetings with directors.

Jenae explained that there is a difference in the daily work of a department, and the visionary work of a department. She sees the two as varied, but related.

Well essentially what we're trying to do is give everybody a framework of what you're doing and why. I mean. There's the everyday work we do, um…that is part of the purpose of student affairs, but they aren't goals. And so we really work very hard to get our staff to sort of separate out what you're trying to do with your goals. And its not just do your job. And so we really try to get people to set goals that are very – um…specific. They are um…usually have a date. Um…connected to when they'll be completed by. And they're under. We have a several key strategic areas ah, um…under which every goal falls under. So, for example, one is student learning and engagement. Another is global understanding and diversity. Um, service delivery. Um. Resources. Collaboration and communication. So what we try to do is make sure we're setting goals for the year or the next two years under those categories. And then move them forward.

Twice per year departments are asked to complete a form that asks about goals, progress toward those goals, and how they are measured so as to improve program quality and support strategic planning. Jeanae admitted that she wanted this information to satisfy institutional reporting requirements.

And really what I want I'm trying to do is get people to write it down for me so that I have it. So that if I have to fill it in in the accreditation materials or somewhere else. I can simply fill that in.

Participant interview data concerning strategic planning at SU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participant(s) noted that the strategic plan was created by representatives from each unit
- Participant(s) handle strategic planning with decentralized operation, by unit

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- Participant(s) indicated that implementation of the strategic plan altered divisional processes and posturing that impact student learning

What we ask our departments to do is um – twice a year – to fill out a – a form essentially – a template that asks us about their goals. And asks about their um progress toward those goals, and how they're measuring the progress. Um. And really what I want I'm trying to do is get people to write it down for me so that I have it. So that if I have to fill it in in the accreditation materials or somewhere else.

Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs at Southern University

Units at SU are required to write student learning outcomes pertaining to the activity of their respective areas. Even though it is an expectation that all units create learning outcomes and use the evidence resultant of learning outcome implementation in an intentional way when making decisions, the different units within the division offer varying levels of quality. Before arriving at the point of writing a student learning outcome, an area must examine the intended learning. Jenae admits that this can be difficult for some areas in student affairs.

So service delivery for example is something that – they're may be a learning component, but the primary purpose is not a learning outcome. So for example, we run a hotel in our student union, and we have students who work at the front desk and certainly they learn – they learn while they're there, but at the end of the day – it's a business – an auxiliary operation. So, so we have kind of some activities, I think, that are more intended for learning. The others are, maybe our student employees learn, for example. Um. But, you know, there's other purposes. So what we do is we ask our staff to write student learning outcomes. What we're hoping is – is that their annual assessment reports measure some of that learning. And some of our departments are better at it than others.

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With low and high quality student learning outcomes within the division and varying

levels of experience in creating student learning outcomes, the intention that a unit will have for

student learning may not be adequately explained in their stated learning outcomes. One

respondent asked

> …what we really want the students to get out of this? And how do we know that they
>
> did? There are still some who continue to do what they do because they believe that's the
>
> right thing to do without having anything to back that up. So, but I think more and more
>
> of my colleagues and I are more intentional.

Participant interview data relating to learning outcomes at SU can be summarized in the

following points.

- Participant(s) revealed that some departments create more robust student learning

  outcomes dependent upon the experience among professionals within each unit

- Participant(s) uncovered that, by unit, learning outcomes are expected to support

  annual reporting

- Participant(s) indicated that the intention of a student learning outcome can be

  difficult in auxiliary areas of student affairs

Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning Linkages at Southern University

It was made obvious from interviews that practitioners were committed to purposeful

connections. One respondent stated,

> Whether you are a clinician, you work in medical records, you work with insurance. You
>
> know, those are all opportunities for ways for our staff to increase um…student learning
>
> in ways I think that previously, they hadn't really thought about before.

Although linkages of assessment, strategic planning, and student learning is operational at SU, it was clear that such linkages are a mixture of effective and ill-effective operation due to varying degrees of expertise among practitioners. According to one respondent,

So what we do is we ask our staff to write student learning outcomes. What we're hoping is – is that they're annual assessment reports measure some of that learning. And some of our departments are better at it than others. I mean, there's just no other way to say that. Um. Some of our departments give me exactly what I'm looking for and they do a cracker jack job of it. And then I've got others that are, you know, still just counting the numbers of people who attended their program. And it's a – it's a learning. It's a slow process.

Linkages are also present through dashboard reporting every two weeks wherein units must be accountable for publically linking assessment and strategic planning practice with learning. However, this is also done to varying degrees of expertise. One respondent indicated that the unit activity automatically indicated student learning by stating "we increase facilities so that we can increase programs which then has the byproduct of increased learning engagement". Another SU respondent shared

Well, you know, one of our key strategic areas is indeed, um, student learning and engagement. So by us having a plan and having goals, most of our goals, I can pretty much go through. I sort of laugh about the fact that one of our key strategic areas is student learning and engagement cause really pretty much everything on this list I can connect to that. I mean and that's the catch all, right? It…everything.

Summary of Participant Interview Data: Linkages at SU

Participant interview data concerning linkages at SU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participant(s) indicate that the existence of programming equates to student learning

- Participant(s) value the key strategic areas (KSAs)

- Participant(s) posit that when KSAs are used as the intention for learning, learning is automatic

Western University

Background and Structure

Western University (WU) is a land-grant university located in the western region of the United States. Founded in 1876, WU became a land-grant institution after the Morrill Land-Grant Act of 1862. A *CampusLabs* affiliate, WU is primarily residential and is in a situated in a metropolitan community. Classified by the Carnegie Foundation (2013) as a research institution with very high research activity, approximately 29,052 students are currently enrolled at WU across ten academic colleges (WU Campus Profile, 2013). Accredited by the Western Association of Colleges and Schools Accrediting Commission of Senior Colleges and Universities, WU is nationally recognized for its biomedical and biomedical engineering programs. According to the WU mission statement,

WU is dedicated to the advancement of knowledge through excellence in education and research at the undergraduate, graduate, professional school and postdoctoral levels. The campus is committed to community engagement, public service and industry partnerships in order to advance the health and well-being of our region, state, nation and the world. Our academic community of world-renowned faculty, bright students and dedicated staff

is characterized by a culture of interdisciplinary collaboration and innovation which

spans the globe. To foster the best possible working and learning environment, our

university strives to maintain a climate of fairness, cooperation, and professionalism….

WU embraces diversity, equity, and inclusion as essential ingredients of academic

excellence in higher education. (About WU webpage, 2013)

Student Affairs division overview and division structure. WU's mission statement for

the Division of Student Affairs states that

Student Affairs supports the teaching, research, and public service missions of the WU,

by providing critical services, developmental activities, and experiences for the

matriculation, academic achievement, personal development, and quality of life for all

UCSD students. (WU Student Affairs webpage, 2013)

The mission continues on to say that

Through both college-based and campus wide services and programs, Student Affairs

fosters the intellectual, social, ethical, and personal development of students, preparing

students to become engaged and constructive members of a diverse, dynamic, and global

society. (WU Student Affairs webpage, 2013)

The organizational chart for the division reveals that the Vice Chancellor for Student

Affairs reports directly to the Chancellor. The Division of Student Affairs comprises ten major

divisions and each division houses several units. Also reporting to the Vice Chancellor for

Student Affairs are College Provosts, College Deans, and Resident Deans. The Vice Chancellor

for Student Affairs supervises fifteen direct reports who in turn are charged with the

responsibility of guiding the work of their respective units. Examples of the division's units

include Technology and the Registrar's Office reporting to the Assistant Vice Chancellor for

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Admissions and Financial aid, Career Services the International Center, and the Office for Academic Support and Instructional Services reporting to the Assistant Vice Chancellor for Experiential Learning.

Participants at WU. Two participants from WU are outlined below. Table 20 provides additional participant characteristics.

Sue. Sue has served for 13 years as one of the four the Assistant Vice Chancellors in the Division of Student Affairs. She is responsible for the student development area of the division, which includes all of the out-of-class support services. When asked to speak about her role(s) in Student Affairs Assessment, Strategic Planning or both, she responded by stating the following.

> the way that strategic planning has worked, um…at the institution, has been that student affairs has been invited to participate in um…um…in the planning process, um…with representatives on most of the committees, um. Um…the…the, help kind of invent what the university's priorities were gonna be.

Sue also revealed that each of the university's Assistant Vice Chancellors play a leadership role by doing strategic planning themselves and engaging the directors in their respective units to do so.

Dot. Dot is has served as the Director of Student Life at Western for five years. She works with director-level direct reports to continuously develop a strategic plan for her area. Assessment happens on a unit level at WU and Dot guides direct reports in the creation and implementation of program assessment and satisfaction surveys.

Table 20

WU Interview Respondent Characteristics

Participant	Position	Years at Institution	Unit in Student Affairs	Role in Assessment	Role in Strategic Planning
1	Assistant vice chancellors	13	Student Affairs	Guides Director-Level reports in creation and implementation	Guides Director-Level reports in creation and implementation
2	Student Life Director	5	Student Life	Guides Director Level Reports in creation and implementation	Guides Director Level Reports in creation and implementation

Assessment in Student Affairs at Western University

The Assistant Vice Chancellor has divisional oversight for assessment and the role also maintains a network of people across the campus that are involved with building, implementing, and critiquing the assessment process. This network of individuals publishes an assessment brief on a quarterly basis that highlights assessment being done in departments.

Respondents reported that WU relies on nationally normed, large-scale surveys in addition to unit level surveys, benchmarking, and focus groups to assess unit activity and any resultant student learning. Dot says that, "in terms of student affairs assessment, we do it by unit or by area". She goes on to say "so we've done assessment for our programs in Student Life and our areas within that. And that we do annually as well". When asked to paint me a picture of how assessment operates in the division, Dot explained how assessment instruments and measures are used by each unit.

> …it's largely up to, left to each unit to do it's own satisfaction survey its own assessment
>
> of programs. Um…You know, in particular, I am involved…kind of a little bit of a foot

in both worlds. One in um my unit specifically with Student Life. We do assessment of,

you know, how are we working with students? Are they enjoying their relationships? The

service that we're providing…those kinds of things…the other aspect of my work,

um…is working to increase wha…what we call campus vitality and student programs.

Um…and campus life overall.

Dot went on to explain a process of benchmarking that her unit is doing to assess the co-

curricular experience. Benchmarking used by her area includes using a survey with freshmen and

then 3-4 years later, using the same survey to gauge what has changed for better or worse. Dot

also spoke to a state university system survey where each of the institutions in the state asks

students at their respective institutions the same questions in relation to co-curricular experience.

She informs that WU has traditionally rated very low in relationship to other schools in the state.

It was also reported that in the last three years, the results have shown increased student

satisfaction. The importance of measuring student satisfaction internal to the institution and in

comparison with other schools was conveyed. Participant interview data concerning assessment

at WU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participant(s) indicated that annual assessment is completed and compared among
  Student affairs divisions at universities across the state

- Participant(s) indicated ownership of the assessment process at the unit level

- Participant(s) revealed that assessment is submitted annually by each unit

- Participant(s) revealed assessment as decentralized and controlled at the unit level

Strategic Planning in Student Affairs at Western University

In 2010 the Chancellor set in motion the strategic planning process for the university

called Western University 2020 in reference to the year and also as a play on words to reference

his vision for the institution. Soon thereafter, the Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs brought together all the division's directors to devise workgroups. Each director had a role in helping to develop at least one of the initiatives for student affairs that tied all work in the division back into the 2020 plan. This process took one and one half years. Each unit utilized the Student Affairs strategic plan and developed its own initiatives and priorities. The initiatives and priorities of each unit were then related back to the 2020 plan.

Prior to the Chancellor's arrival in 2010 neither the Student Affairs Division nor the university had a comprehensive strategic plan. The Vice Chancellor followed the lead of the new Chancellor, and currently, each unit within Student Affairs creates and maintains a strategic plan. The divisional strategic plan has major goals. During her interview, Sue articulated them each.

…major goals in the strategic plan and there's six. One is improve student retention, graduation and academic success. Two is expand access and opportunity for students from diverse backgrounds to create and sustain a healthy safe, civil, and campus community. Three is to cultivate a vibrant campus community that is welcome, inclusive, respectful, and responsive to all needs of all, all community members. Four is to provide co-curricular services and programs that support student learning, leadership and personal/professional development, five is to raise SU's profile regionally and globally while creating and expanding existing partnerships in the surrounding community. And six is to identify and develop resources to help the division to achieve those goals.

The first main goal of the division's strategic plan cited by Dot was assessment. In speaking about assessment, she mentioned, "in fact, I think in student affairs in particular, we don't do that well". To illustrate her point, Dot gave an example of how some programs, such as community service at WU are not assessed well. She criticized by stating, "we haven't developed

a narrative or a quantifiable way to express that, or share that, or talk about that". Dot shared that although there are high rankings each year regarding the community service that students do, there is no formal institutional infrastructure built around supporting students with space or personnel focused on coordinating community service. The third priority of the strategic plan that she cited was student affairs personnel development in terms of scholarship and professional development. Lastly, she spoke minimally about improving campus life, student success, and increasing international student enrollment.

When asked to elaborate on the strategic plan goal of student success, Dot referenced the lack of a life skills intro class. This particular strategic planning goal was one suggested for improvement by the accrediting region body, and also by the academic leadership of WU. With a high percentage of first generation college students attending WU, this suggestion was significant. Further elaborating on student success, she spoke to learning communities by saying "in that, we have them, but again, we don't really do a good job of helping students to translate why learning communities would help them, and how, academically, they can apply those."

For one and one half years, Dot has worked with her director-level direct reports within the Student Life unit to develop a strategic plan and initiatives for the unit. Dot admitted, "typically, I don't think we don't do a lot of strategic planning". Participant interview data: concerning strategic planning at WU can be summarized in the following points.

- Participant(s) suggested that strategic plan results do not always result in divisional change
- Participant(s) regularly noted strategic planning as a decentralized operation, by unit
- Participant(s) give the impression that divisional strategic planning is weakly conducted

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Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs at Western University

As has already been stated, the fourth major goal of the WU strategic plan is to provide co-curricular services and programs that support student learning, leadership and personal/professional development. As practitioners develop action plans, care is taken to make sure that the associated metrics show the intended student learning outcome. Equipped with action plans to share intention and direction, metrics to numerate goals, and student learning outcomes to illustrate the intended learning, Sue admits that this is not adequate.

> you know, best practices for…for being able to um articulate outcomes of peer programs, there isn't a whole lot out there. You know, that is….it. The other stuff. Out of class learning is not as…um…is not measures that are as well developed for some of those kinds of programs as there are for classroom learning.

She went on to say "we have to be trailblazers", meaning that there are few reliable methods to capture co-curricular student learning. Sue admitted,

> So there's some things that we're finding that we would wanna measure that we…that aren't a lot of good models out there and so we're really having to spend some time. Um…thinking about how would we….a…do sound assessment and give us meaningful feedback that could inform the development and measuring of our programs.

Summary of Participant Interview Data: Learning Outcomes Planning at WU

Participant interview data concerning learning outcomes at WU can be summarized in the following point. Participant(s) describe not having adequate resources to assess co-curricular learning

Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning Linkages at Western University

When asked to explain how the Division of Student Affairs at WU intentionally links assessment, strategic planning and student learning, Dot made clear that intentional links do not occur. She stated, "I don't think we do. From my perspective, we don't". Sue answered

> …linking a…metrics to the action plan is probably the way we intend to move forward. Um…And just to be sure that we're gonna realign our activities toward out strategic priorities, um…and…you know, and that we have a…a more evidence-based um…feedback loop than we…we…than we have now. To really make that more robust.

Neither of the respondents' answers was clear. Even upon delivering the respondents a line of probing questions, neither were able to explain how, if at all intentional links occur.

Summary of Participant Interview Data: Linkages at WU

Participant interview data relating to linkages at WU can be summarized be the following points.

- Participant(s) asked questions aloud to conceptualize and explain linkages
- Participant(s) suggested that effective linkages among assessment, strategic planning, and student learning do not occur

CHAPTER 5. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

This study was undertaken to determine the extent to which student affairs assessment data are utilized in strategic planning of student learning at six land-grant, *CampusLabs* institutions. The chapter contains acknowledgement of research questions and results of cross-case analysis as presented from among the six cases. Qualitative methodology, which included multiple site case study, was used to identify case institutions wherein respondents expounded upon student affairs-related strategic planning, assessment, student learning, and linkages among the three.

Evidence to support findings from each institution was derived of analytic coding techniques in succession, open, axial, to selective. The same process was followed for each case. This chapter demarcates findings across cases. According to the sampling procedures employed by the study, convenience, maximum variation sampling (purposive sampling) including of Skype-based interviews and document review. Findings gleaned from institutional document review are also illustrated across case themes and patterns. At least two respondents were highlighted each chapter, in accordance with the accrediting region of their institution.

To establish context structural information such as student and faculty demographics, academic programs, and institutional and divisional missions were provided in chapter four, scaffolding the study. Findings acquired from document and interview protocols related to this conceptual framework are expressed by the following headings.

1. Study Participants

2. Assessment in Student Affairs

3. Strategic Planning in Student Affairs

4. Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs

5. Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning Linkages

Evolving from the literature were the conceptual framework and all data mining tools; interview, institutional selection, and document review protocols. Each protocol question related directly to one of the five research questions.

1. How are divisional assessment processes linked to student learning?

2. How are divisional strategic plan(s) linked to student learning?

3. How do student affairs divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment?

4. Who is involved in divisions' assessment and/or strategic planning, and what are the major responsibilities of these individuals?

5. What are common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning?

Protocols and research questions aligned with the conceptual framework (see Appendices for complete protocol listing). Table 21 highlights alignment of research questions, items from the interview and document protocols with the conceptual framework, derived from the literature review.

Summary of Study Participants Across Case Institutions

Axial and selective coding and cross case analysis of participant demographics revealed two core themes. During data and document analysis, the first theme of role restriction became apparent. Only senior and middle level professionals had been submitted across all institutional liaisons. In contrast, the theme of situational variance was also gleaned as the respondents represented a "wide range of functional areas" (Dungy, 2003, p. 339). Respondents reported holding student affairs leadership positions ranging anywhere from Vice President to

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Table 21

Relationship Between Research Questions, Interview Questions/Protocol, Document Protocols,
and Conceptual Framework

Research Questions	Interview Questions/Protocol	Document Protocol	Conceptual Framework Concept
RQ1	What are the major goals of your division's assessment efforts?	Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions	Division mission and objectives flow from the institution's mission
	Please describe examples of how divisional assessment leads to student learning?	Document Content Analysis Protocol Pilot Interview Moderator Outline	People/Process/Timeline/Data connection to strategic decisions and student learning.
	Explain how assessment data is used in strategic planning to improve student learning.		
	How do divisional assessment goals improve student learning?		
RQ2	What are the major goals of your division's strategic plan?	Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions	Division mission and objectives flow from the institution's mission
	Please describe examples of how divisional strategic planning leads to student learning?	Document Content Analysis Protocol Pilot Interview Moderator Outline	People/Process/Timeline/Data connection to strategic decisions and student learning.
	Explain how assessment data is used in strategic planning to improve student learning.		
	Please explain how divisional strategic planning goals improve student learning?		
RQ3	How does the strategic planning process operate in your division?	Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions	Division mission and objectives flow from the institution's mission

Table 21. *Relationship Between Research Questions, Interview Questions/Protocol, Document Protocols, and Conceptual Framework (continued)*

Research Questions	Interview Questions/Protocol	Document Protocol	Conceptual Framework Concept
	What are the major goals of your division's assessment efforts? Explain how assessment data is used in strategic planning to improve student learning. What form of assessment data is most relevant to strategic planning?	Document Content Analysis Protocol Pilot Interview Moderator Outline	People/Process/Timeline/Data connection to strategic decisions and student learning.
RQ4	Please state your specific unit within student affairs and the number of years you have been at this institution. Please tell me a little bit about your role(s) in Student Affairs Assessment, Strategic Planning or both Please explain how divisional strategic planning goals improve student learning? Who is involved in the division's strategic planning process? What are the major responsibilities of these individuals? Who is involved in the division's assessment process? What are the major responsibilities of these individuals?	Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions Document Content Analysis Protocol Pilot Interview Moderator Outline	Division mission and objectives flow from the institution's mission People/Process/Timeline/Data connection to strategic decisions and student learning.
RQ5	Paint me a picture of how assessment operates in your division? How does the strategic planning process operate in your division?	Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions Document Content Analysis Protocol	Division mission and objectives flow from the institution's mission People/Process/Timeline/Data connection to strategic decisions and student learning.

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Table 21. *Relationship Between Research Questions, Interview Questions/Protocol, Document Protocols, and Conceptual Framework (continued)*

Research Questions	Interview Questions/Protocol	Document Protocol	Conceptual Framework Concept
	I am curious to hear how the division of student affairs at [institution] intentionally links assessment, strategic planning and student learning? Can you tell me more about that?	Pilot Interview Moderator Outline	
	How is strategic planning information shared or communicated on campus?		
	Tell me about how assessment data is shared or communicated on campus?		
	What form of assessment data is most relevant to strategic planning?		

Note: Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions: See appendix
Document Content Analysis Protocol: See appendix
Pilot Interview Moderator Outline: See appendix

other administrative roles within the division. However, all of them reported having assessment

and/or strategic planning within their job functions.

Summary of Assessment Across Case Institutions

The lead researcher and the secondary researchers identified four selective, four axial, and forty-eight open categories during cross-case data analysis of divisional assessment (see Figure 9).

The open codes (see Figure 9) were narrowed into four axial codes and four selective codes were chosen to situate understanding of the phenomenon. Varied approach to assessment,

performance justification, existence justification, and underlying archetype were identified as the

selective codes.

Open Codes	Axial Codes	Selective Codes
Large departments report to the Dean of Students	decentralization	performance justification
student affairs directors involved in assessment (CW, pg3)	decentralization	Varied Approach to Assessment
assessment as very decentralized and disciplined specific (CW, pg3)	decentralization	Varied Approach to Assessment
Data collection, responsibilities are broken by departments, report to the Dean and Associate Dea	decentralization	Varied Approach to Assessment
asses operates: establish central assessment , allowing units to use their own expertise of their ov	decentralization	Varied Approach to Assessment
we have a person who is in charge of assessment for the division. It falls under her job descriptio	decentralization	Varied Approach to Assessment
Each unit is responsible for their own assessment and learning outcomes to support the division a	decentralization	Varied Approach to Assessment
The VP and the director of SA ... gave them charge of the initiatives, suggestions (RS, p.5)	decentralization	Varied Approach to Assessment
Many people in different departments manage their own assesment, one coordinating committe	decentralized	Varied Approach to Assessment
We have representatitves from each department that serve on division-wide assessment (PH, p.	decentralized	Varied Approach to Assessment
There are only two people within the division who has assessment in their title.. everybody else is	decentralized	Varied Approach to Assessment
Assessment for academics is done at the provost office (BH, p. 7)	decentralized	Varied Approach to Assessment
It is a comprehensive view (MY p.2)	decentralization	Varied Approach to Assessment
On this research commitee and assessment every cluster is represented (BH, p.1)	decentralized	Varied Approach to Assessment
Decentralized, no full time employee that works on assessment (TB, p. 3)	decentralized	Varied Approach to Assessment
Assessment turns into strategic planning. It becomes part of a bigger picture (MY, p.2)	leveraging results	performance justification existence justification
Some department don't participate, but the consequence is not getting any additional funding (M	decentralization	Varied Approach to Assessment
In the assessment council we are talking about learning outcomes (MY, p.1)	connect to student learning	underlying archetype
Metric is our majote tool for assessment (TB, p. 7)	leveraging results	performance justification
Our next step in (assessment) is to develop learning outcomes for each of the departments who I	connect to student learning	underlying archetype
We all believe we are doing (student learning) but we have no way to show that (TB,p. 7)	connect to student learning	underlying archetype
Assessment is not just about accountability but about pride that you are making a diffference (BI	connect to student learning	underlying archetype
Assessment plan is focus on learning outcomes (RS, p. 3)	connect to student learning	underlying archetype
Learning outcomes based on CAS standards	connect to student learning	performance justification
Each department required to have an assessment plan and to link assessment with student learni	leveraging results/connect to student learning	performance justification
Assessment turns into strategic planning	leveraging results/connect to student learning	performance justification
Includes: initiatives, goals, and the learning outcomes related to each other goals	connect to student learning/leveraging results	performance justification existence justification
division: develop a discreet number of outcomes that they will develop both either learning or wl	connect to student learning/leveraging results	performance justification
Knowing importance of assessment what we are doing and why	leveraging results/connect to student learning	Varied Approach to Assessment
Participate in national assessment CIRP and NSSE	leveraging results	performance justification
Assessment is not just about accountability but about pride that you are making a diffference	leveraging results	existence justification
Goals for SA division	leveraging results	performance justification
Right assessment finding the best practices in engagement and outreach to imporve student leari	leveraging results	performance justification
Assessment is used to verify that what we say we are doing (MY, p.2)	leveraging results	performance justification
Outcome base assessment is more intentional with programs and services (MY, p.2)	leveraging results	existence justification
Groups layout the intended outcomes, tarets and methodologies for measuring .. at the divisiona	leveraging results	performance justification
we have SA assessment and learning outcomes group. Each unit is responsible for their own asses	leveraging results	performance justification
Do Learning outcomes base on CAS standards (AG, p.2)	leveraging results	performance justification
goals of the assessment plan are to document progress on our strategic priorities. And the goal of	leveraging results	performance justification
Within each unit, we required assessment , we assessed and then we will link the results to planir	leveraging results	performance justification
We are not looking a new outcomes or goals that we didn't have before. We are looking at servic	leveraging results	performance justification
Deparment assessment plan includes: initiatives, goals and learning outcomes related to each ot	leveraging results	performance justification
In SA division assessment develop a plan for the division with a group developed a realistics asses	leveraging results	performance justification
The assessment report includes an outline of the data used and recommendations for the future	leveraging results	performance justification existence justification
A re- acreditation started off assessment (TB, p. 3)	leveraging results	performance justification
Student Affairs division here has kind of mandated to all units to develop 2 new outcomes: one di	decentralized, leveraging results	Varied Approach to Assessment
Assessment more centralized (WE, p. 3)	decentralized, leveraging results	performance justification existence justification
SA is a group in charged with the decision making, implementation, evaluation, review of assessm	leveraging results/decentralization	performance justification

Figure 9. Open, axial, and selective categories depicting assessment in student affairs across cases.

Varied approach to assessment. While respondents and institutional documents revealed

assessment as decentralized and operated at the unit level across all institutions, the approach

varied by institution. NEU, for example, imposed locally created metrics as significant in the

assessment process and reported the results internal to student affairs. Units at NCU used an

assessment reporting website to create and maintain password protected data, in which a

diversity and student development outcome per unit were mandatory. At WU each student affairs

unit completes a state-shared annual assessment and the results are compared among Student

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Affairs divisions at universities across the state. The finding of varied approach to assessment is congruent with portions of the conceptual frame used in this study in that respondents reported multiple measures in order to assess, and that committees give momentum to assessment processes.

Performance Justification

Respondents across cases were clear in that assessment is, in part, endeavored to justify the funding, structure, and social placement of the division and its respective units. One respondent was noted as saying "Assessment is used to verify what we say we are doing". Respondents of NEU explained that in response to threat of losing accreditation, reactionary assessment was mandated through divisional posturing of Student Affairs leadership with no focus to contribute more to student learning, but rather to increase commendation and resources. The selective code of performance justification is aligned with portions of the conceptual frame; respondents reported identified student affairs leadership as champions. According to the conceptual frame, champions are needed to guide the process, timeline, and assessment data.

Existence Justification

Each SU respondent consistently deferred to the divisional assessment committee and subcommittees and how their work enhances student affairs assessment and generates relevancy. Despite how unit-level participation in assessment seemed to be a point of pride across cases having decentralized assessment environments, respondents characteristically discussed division-level committees when specifically asked to answer questions relating to unit-level behavior of assessment. Expectations, participation, and standards for assessing student learning varied from one division to another. "Some departments don't participate, but the consequence is not getting

any additional funding" one participant remarked. Another respondent lamented, "We all believe we are doing (student learning) but we have no way to show that".

Underlying Archetype

A plethora of archetypes were identified among respondents and documents submitted for review. They included, but were not limited to assessment plans, committee registry's comprised of unit level representatives, unit-level annual reports displaying assessment data, and duplicate or triplicate assessment reporting documents providing program, unit, and division compliance. Respondents from WU indicated that annual assessment is completed and compared among student affairs divisions at universities across the state, creating common practice.

Archetypes imported and exported across the field of student affairs were found at the program, unit, and division levels. This included unit, division, and national databases to view comparable data. For example, one respondent stated, "Our next step in (assessment) is to develop learning outcomes for each of the departments who help student learning". A respondent from another institution commented, "[The] assessment plan is focused on learning outcomes". This comment highlights that widely adopted archetypes undergird the assessment process. Regardless of the quantity, quality or extent to which the archetype existed among divisions, repurposing and tailoring such archetypes to units – or programs within units was common. The study revealed that archetypes occur and reoccur consistently. As such, there was little evidence among documents or respondents to demonstrate how archetypes were used to operate the work of student affairs professionals or improve practice toward increased student learning.

Summary of Strategic Planning Across Case Institutions

The research team identified two selective, three axial, and forty-two open categories during cross-case data analysis of divisional strategic planning (see Figure 10).

The core categories of selective coding that were found to have direct bearing on the phenomenon of strategic planning in student affairs are activity justification and connection, and varied approach to strategic planning.

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Qualitative data is more relevant in the strategic planning (PH, 16)	OUTLIER	
Assessement link to the results to the planning and goals for our unit	leveraging connectivity/interconnectivity of activity	
University goals tied to the strategic planning	interconnectivity of activity	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning/activity justification & connection
Three basic parts of the assessment: develop metrics, learning and service outcome (TB, p.1)	interconnectivity of activity	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
planning committee made up of people from around the division, additional metrics developed by each d	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
Strategic Planning is a priority for the VP (MY, p. 2)	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
We focus on measuring learning outcomes (M, p.2)	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
philosophy of continous improvement committee	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
various committees depending on department to develop plan	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
all units have to develop plans that reflect university's strategic plan	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
SP allowed the commitee to build the idea of SP is a good and it can be tied into the work we do (Tb, 4)	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
In the process of Strategic Plannning, for over 20 years I don't remember a comprehensive approach (MY	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
Our strategic planning process follows philosophy of continuous improvement committee assigned perm	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
assess operates: establish central assessment , allowing units to use their own expertise of their own ope	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
SP adopted: asked all units, faculty and academic units witin the division to work on assessmetn and learr	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
members from the division would get together lead by human resources to give input into the strategic p	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
look at the vision statement and mission statement and give feedback into the construction of it with our	decentralized operations	Varied Approach to Strategic Planning
The first SP was a gorund up foundation- based initiative , a lot of lowe level employees built the plan, no	interconnectivity of activity/decentralized o	activity justification & connection
SAAC- 14 or 15 members start the talk about development of outcomes, learning outcomes, service outc	decentralized operations/interconnectivity c	activity justification & connection
VP, 2 assistant VP and 1 Chief of staff (are involved in SP) (WE, p. 6)	interconnectivity of activity/decentralized o	activity justification & connection
strategic planning committee that is comprised of people from all around the division (DD, 4)	decentralized operations/interconnectivity c	activity justification & connection
define outcomes that they are going to connect directly to strategic priorities thereby when they are pulli	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
It is done through conversations, annual report innitiatives to the VP	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
It is used for consultation with academic division and student affairs department	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
We are doing pretty good job to start with what we know and improve things, and find bet	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
Our goal is to impact student behaviors to adjust our practices, slow changing process, slow change to a h	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
If staff is buying the goals the SP has the most impact in students (PH, 18)	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
The lack of engaged in communication of the staff in the goals reduces opportunities and collaboration (F	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
The department directors and a comitter within the departments are responsible of the SP (PH,20)	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
Divison SP process is shared at the division, then people that have the energy, volunteers to wrok on any	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
Focus on the needs of students and how we partner with people (BH, p.5)	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
How are we (SA) helping student to make connections (BHp, 5)	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
Goals are set in terms of learning objectives (BH, p.9)	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
We develop Sp based on what we are doing (tb,4)	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
Major goal- reporting, training and collaboration- creating partnerships among areas (PH, p.1)	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
It is a different than assessment, but it is link to assessment	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
No division SP only university-wide SP	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
Goals are based on what's is lacking	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
Student affairs document call pursuing a posibility of rich future, to create environments that stregthen h	interconnectivity of activity	activity justification & connection
follows philosophy of continous improvement committee assigned permanently for each section of our st	decentralized responsibility	activity justification & connection
departments set of metrics on which they report, metrics are either division/department metrics that eve	decentralized responsibility	activity justification & connection
Divided into six major areas: teaching and learning, discovery and research, resources, faculty and staff de	OUTLIER	

Figure 10. Open, axial, and selective categories depicting strategic planning in student affairs across cases.

Activity justification and connection. Respondents preferred to explicate on questions of connectivity or collective responsibility instead of program or unit level responsibility. Uncovered during the creation of institutional summaries of participant interview data connection or interlinking of assessment data across units in order to justify divisional strategic planning, echoed throughout cases as a common practice. Respondent comments such as "university goals (are) tied to the strategic plan", and "(student affairs) define outcomes that they are going to connect directly to strategic priorities thereby when they are pulling on those assessment results, they will be reporting on strategic plan progress", illustrate a desire to make division and university level connections.

A review of strategic plans, which outlines divisional conduct, illustrated that the strategic connections made among programs, units, the division, and the institution gave the appearance of interdependency. Such interdependency gave justification unit programmatic activity. In other words, connection between and among units gave legitimacy to daily operational conduct, justifying the unit activity. Such legitimacy was important to respondents as it related to recognition, future budget increases, and the maintenance of annual funding from year to year at the same level. Marsha commented, "we often are sharing data with our, uh again, oversight groups or with uh, people who provided us funding for some of those programs". She later went on to say

> …so for us its not just individually having you garner rich resources, right, through merit money but…but also happens that evaluation or data suggests that, um, worthy of external funding.

Although strategic plan interdependency was apparent across institutions, the method of activity justification varied. Participants at MSU revealed connecting practice to the university strategic plan is by practitioner choice. At NEU and SU, representatives from each unit created the divisional strategic plan. NCU participants shared that committees with subcommittees are responsible for divisional strategic planning. At NWCU participants identified that units carry out strategic initiatives, according to the directive of each strategic initiative committee. Participants from WU noted strategic planning as a decentralized operation, by unit.

Within the case summaries of each institution, evidence of interconnectivity was found that gave rise to a justification process validated by the connections to a university or division level. With the exception of NCU that uses an interactive database for strategic planning from unit, to division, and then to the university level, unit level activity justification was ill

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articulated, and appeared to be unsubstantial. Utilization of interdepartmental alliances created the appearance of a healthy strategic plan. Given this, plans did not demonstrate continuous improvement.

Varied approach to strategic planning. According to the summary of participant interview data, one well-documented approach to strategic planning was to connect strategy to assessment data or processes. This approach necessitates the practitioner to rely on familiarity with the unit and assessment data within so as to inform future work that will affect student learning. MSU participants indicated that strategic planning grew from the division's assessment process. Similarly both NCU and NWCU participants revealed assessment and strategic planning as inclusive of each other. Participants there posited that assessment plans have a role in divisional strategy planning. One participant was noted as saying, "Assessment links to the results to the planning and goals for our unit". While it was clear that there is a relationship between assessment and strategic planning, the approach to achieve this ideal state varied among the case institutions. Goodwin stated,

> …we will link our, the results of our assessment to our planning, or I don't know if I
>
> want to call it strategic planning, but our planning and goals for our unit. So, I guess you
>
> could say its strategic planning. Um, so that's really the initiative within our division, is
>
> to have every one of our units being able to do that. So we're not creating new, um, you
>
> know, outcomes or goals that we have, didn't have before, but we're looking at what
>
> services we provide, what programs we offer, and what opportunities students have to
>
> learn within our units and within the division. And then we assess those programs, those
>
> um…a…services, and then we link that to our strategic planning.

Among some participant institutions, a goal or initiative-driven approach to strategic planning was adopted. These particular cases focused on 5 to 6 major areas or initiatives to lead strategic planning efforts at the division or institution level. For some the strategic planning was still perceived as new, therefore they were at the point of uncovering ways to strengthen the programs. Even though most respondents mentioned goals or initiatives, many could not explicitly describe their division's strategic plan, or how it worked to energize or operate the goals or initiatives. This is problematic, convoluting or perhaps completely misconstruing the terms strategic planning and assessment may lead to not being able to fully execute either one properly. However Christie explained her unit's approach well.

> …our student activities department has goals that are informed by the priorities and the division's strategic plans. So the division has 5 strategic priorities and whenever our department meets once a year to um, you know, wrap up our goals from the past year and develop our goals for the next year, we use those priorities as the broad categories for the department goals.

One case institution did not have a divisional strategic plan. A participant stated that there is "no division strategic plan, only university-wide strategic plan".

Summary of Learning Outcomes Across Case Institutions

Four selective, four axial, and twenty-three open categories emerged during cross-case data analysis of divisional learning outcomes (see Figure 11). The core categories of selective coding that have direct bearing on the phenomenon under study are reliance on interconnectedness, justification, learning motive, and student improvement.

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Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
It is based on assessment outcomes to enhance our programs and service t	Student Learning: Links to Improvement	justification/learning motive
Assessment data, strategic planning, and student learning is a circular thing		justification/learning motive
Within each unit we required student learning outcomes assessment	pursuit to justify activity by implying student learning	justification/learning motive
Most of the things we do (SP) come under T&L (BH, p.1)		
Annual report- the goals dirertly relate to the division strategic plan and un	pursuit to justify activity by institutional interaconnectivity	reliance on interconnectedness
Student affairs have to sho how we are integral into the learning of the stu	pursuit to justify activity by institutional interaconnectivity	reliance on interconnectedness
Focus on the needs of students and how we partner with people (BH, p.5)	pursuit to justify activity by institutional interaconnectivity	reliance on interconnectedness
How SA is helping students to make connections: academic leadership? (BH	pursuit to justify activity by institutional interaconnectivity	reliance on interconnectedness
We are experts on the student experience (BH, p.8)	pursuit to justify activity by implying student learning	justification
We couldn't do strategic planning and improve student learning without th	philosophy of learning/pursuit to justify activity by implying student	justification/learning motive
Assessment data, strategic planning and student learning is a circular thing	philosophy of learning/pursuit to justify activity by implying student	justification/learning motive
Pursuing a Possibility of Rich Future document- to create environments tha	pursuit to justify activity by implying student learning	justification/learning motive
We focus on measuring learning outcomes (M, p.2)	pursuit to justify activity by implying student learning	justification/learning motive
learning outcomes are		
going to be informed by priorities in the strategic plan		
(CW, pg 4)		
	pursuit to justify activity by implying student learning	justification/learning motive
every learning outcome has a question and a metric to go with it,	pursuit to justify activity by implying student learning	justification/learning motive
Goal- to improve communication among students (PH, 9)	training ground for students	
pedagogy should follow your outcomes (CW, pg 5)	philosophy of lealrning	learning motive
Student experience is defined but it is difficult to articulate a learning outc	pursuit to justify activity by implying student learning	justification/learning motive
In SA it is difficult to demonstrate the impact of student learning (PH, 13)	pursuit to justify activity by implying student learning	justification/learning motive
Data helps gauge success in student learning (PH, 14)	pursuit to justify activity by implying student learning	justification/learning motive
Our goal is to impact student behaviors to adjust our practices, slow changi	pursuit to justify activity by implying student learning/training grour	justification/learning motive/student improvement
Create a connection with students and sense of belongingness (PK, 5)	philosophy of learning	learning motive
Staff division are ask to think of themselves and their encounters with stud	pursuit to justify activity by implying student	justification/learning motive/student improvement

Figure 11. Open, axial, and selective categories depicting learning outcomes in student affairs across cases.

Reliance on Interconnectedness

An inextricable pattern of reliance on connections at program, unit, division, and institutional levels emerged from cross-case analysis. Among case institutions with significant experience in relying on institutional and divisional connections, the process of connection appears synchronized. For example, NCU participants asserted that each unit builds learning outcomes to adhere to the divisional strategic plan, which, in turn adheres to the university strategic plan. Such repurposing of student learning outcomes are mostly unit-specific, but some outcomes, due to the nature of how practitioners rely on (and utilize) the work of each other, are carbon copied from one unit to another. This interconnectedness that results in shared student learning outcomes can render meaningful progress difficult to track. Christie shared,

> Then, we have each time a student takes that instrument, any instrument, you know, so maybe pre-school training, it may be January in-service, or maybe then they are a leader in another program. Like we know what instrument they've taken and what questions they've addressed. And then since we track all this, we know how many times each

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learning outcome has been assessed. I mean, I'm not trying to pretend like we're all

proficient. It's been a long process to get developed. And this is how technically, it

works. It's just very – a lot to manage.

During NCU annual reporting, in tandem with the university and the division mission, all units

are required to align student learning outcomes in three categories (1) diversity, (2) service, and

(3) a student learning outcome.

In reality, synchronization was weakened and plagued by professionals with varying

degrees of experience. Smaller units were mandated to participate in interconnection, but were

regulated to fewer resources than larger units. NWCU participants revealed that departments

having more human capital in terms of professional experience and capacity were able to execute

more robust student learning outcomes. Respondents at WU acknowledged the challenge of not

having adequate resources to assess co-curricular learning. The reliance on connection was found

to be evident, but undependable. Eddy remarked,

> the way we really link the student learning to our learning outcomes effort and the
>
> different departments had taken it to different degrees because we have a large of
>
> professional staff members. I'd been able to educate them on learning outcomes. How do
>
> we develop them? And how do we report them back to the division? So, we… in our
>
> department measure 35 outcomes that we specifically measure in a formal way. We
>
> believe that we measure more, but we only have 35 that we report in a formal way. Some
>
> department that only have 4 or 5 staff members \ may be only be measuring 2 or 3
>
> learning outcomes.

As detailed in the MSU case study description, the catalyst for producing student learning

outcomes was to reposition the image of student affairs professionals as educators. Their work

was not contingent upon or driven by the need to effect student learning development. Jenae, a respondent from SU remarked that she was working in direct response to an upcoming accreditation visit.

> Our accreditation process is coming up. Um. 2013 is the 10-year accreditation process. So, we're started collecting some info and organizing it and where, I think, student affairs is gonna come out very ahead is we're – we're collecting assessment information. I don't think any of our academic units really are. So, you know, I – I'm chuckling because nobody's worried about what student affairs is gonna put in all those little boxes. They're concerned about what academic affairs is gonna put in about what did you – what did you learn from these results? What did you prove? We have. I have got a ton of examples of things we have done and improved. And I think overall those – it'll speak for itself. When it's time.

Driven by the legitimacy that accompanies high-profile visibility and political benefits of interdepartmental interconnection and collaborations, respondents were consistent in the mentality of student learning outcome development as a reaction or afterthought. Eddy explained,

> like 6 years ago when the university was going under accreditation. The one area of focus or accreditation agency was outcome documentation, assessment documentation. Student Affairs then they decided to join our academic colleagues and measure what learning were possible in Camps Recreation we employed about 800 to a 1000 students per year, and so we realize we had an opportunity to actually measure the learning that is going out. We used to do basically learning evaluations, but then we kind of moved toward learning outcomes.

NEU participants, much like participants at MSU, also revealed the relative novelty of learning outcomes measurement. The analyses of interview data drawn from these cases reveal that the underlying behaviors that characterize reliance on interconnectedness range from novice to expert, depending upon the unit size, division's agenda, and experience of the professionals charged (or available) to demonstrate interconnection.

Justification

"We are experts on the student experience", said one participant. Since respondents did not have much quantifiable evidence from which to base their comments, declarative statements that justified existence and operation of student affairs arose from interview data. For example, MSU participants informed that student learning outcomes and domains are based on CAS standards, but they were hard pressed to demonstrate how. Respondents often referenced third party tools of measurement such as the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP), the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), and Educational Benchmarking Inc. (EBI) believed to capture student learning. Tom posited, "I don't think student affairs can justify their existence for very - very well. It's cruel to say, but it's true I am afraid". Respondents also referenced knowledge of accreditation standards, but were unsure as to how they were to apply their work with student learning to those standards or how their work was to be translated into those standards.

Learning Motive

Findings from interview and document review illustrate that student affairs practitioners use a variety of methods to articulate intended learning. Without proliferation of performance-based measures associated with program, unit and division level activity, evidence of intended learning is latent and can be difficult to substantiate with immediacy. Patricia remarked, "its

difficult to articulate a learning outcome". According to the individual case summary findings, MSU participants reported that Student Affairs patterned after Academic Affairs in measuring student learning outcomes. Across cases, student affairs had adopted practices from their academic affairs counterparts to capture related learning. This stance of patterning is accompanied by rhetoric that encourages practitioners to move beyond service delivery toward considering themselves as educators. Patricia stated,

> I mean we've requested our, our, our staff to think of themselves and think of their
> encounters with students as teachable moments. And so, for us, an example would be
> when a student comes in and they don't understand their insurance. You know, possibly,
> you know their parents have taken care of that for a long time. But that's a skill that
> they're going to…to learn how to negotiate when they leave here also. And so, it's not
> just doing it necessarily for the student, but showing the student how it can be done,
> helping explain the importance of certain…certain aspects so that um…they, they learn
> how to a…to navigate systems um…so that when they leave they, they, they feel very
> comfortable doing that...feel comfortable doing that…um…for themselves while they're
> here and be the advocates for their own health.

Betty's comments were strikingly similar to Patricia's comments relating to practitioner as educator. She remarked,

> one of the challenges I often give people within my division is…I don't care what you're
> doing, whether their in leadership or are RA's in the residence hall, are you asking them
> about their classes? Are you expecting them to do well? Are you engaging them in
> saying, what are you doing in your classroom, what are you learning in your classroom
> that can also be translated to what you're doing in your job here or in your leadership

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role? How are we helping students make that connection? So, we're asking the academic

side to do that with us, we have to do a better job of doing it. And I think, by having

learning outcomes, starting to think in terms of being educators instead of just service

providers helps to get us closer to that goal.

Units were found to be in different stages of applying knowledge of how students learn

because, in the absence of formalizing continuous improvement of student learning from the

division level, work was completed, measured, and fine-tuned on various timelines.

Student Improvement

This construct relates to the above construct of learning motive, but departs from learning

and extends to student behavior. Respondents spoke in the context of students knowing or

behaving differently after exposure to a student affairs activity. Case institutions vary in their

methods to measure student improvement. According to Tom,

Metrics don't really deal with student learning well. There are other ways to assess them.

Our next step, is to start developing learning outcomes for each of the departments in the

division… in other words, how has… Is what we are doing helping students learn? Um, I

think we all um…believe we are doing that, but we have no way to show that we are

doing that. So we have not advanced that very far yet.

According to Kim, NCU has a new process that evidences student learning.

…all units have these outcomes. Now they are going to start classifying them. That

means that they will be able to develop a report on what kinds of student development

and learning is being measured or assessed. And they will be able to also have a report on

what kind of assessments are being used. Also any kind of program improvements and a -

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the types of those improvements. So, we are building a capacity to – to develop those

reports about student learning and development in student affairs.

The results of what Kim describes have not yet been published. However, it is a system of

reporting that is interdependent upon program, unit, and division level creation of learning

outcomes, assessment, and reporting that results in changed behavior, an indication of learning.

One participant suggested "every department, every director, every division to be thinking about

what student learning should look like in terms of that one outcome".

Summary of Linkages Across Case Institutions

There were seven selective, seven axial, and forty-three open categories during cross-case

data analysis of divisional linkages (see Figure 12).

The seven selective codes supporting understanding of the phenomena were

decentralization, mystified purpose, justification, unpreparedness, student improvement, learning

motive, and reliance on interconnectedness.

Decentralization

The student affairs agendas across case institutions were visible due to decentralization of

responsibility relating to assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. While some case

institutions had commissioned committees, others utilized personnel who had related

responsibility in their job description. It is important to note that both committees and appointed

individuals also included academic affairs personnel. Decentralization was instrumental in

proliferating the student affairs message and work throughout the division because there was

representation that either volunteered or was appointed from each unit.

Open Coding	Axial Coding	Selective Coding
Connected to strategic planning	Student Learning: Links to Planning	
For some units main goal and objective	decentralized	decentralization
How student affairs can contribute towards academic leadership?	sense of uncertainty/Student Learning: Links to P	Mystified purpose
Students affairs are experts in student experience	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification
Assessment data, strategic planning, and student learning is a circular th	philosophy of learning/pursuit to justify activity k	justification/learning motive
It's based on data and set learning outcomes	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification
We are experts on the student experience (BH, p.4)	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification
tweaked our learning outcomes based on what we learned from our stu	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification
Recreational activities to support the mission of the department (PH, 9)	philosophy of learning	learning motive
It is important to provide service engage and prepare students for life (P	training ground for students/ pursuit to justify ac	student improvement
Lack of evidence in student learning in programming (PH, 12)	No evidence or intent of learning/sense of uncer	unpreparedness
Development of global citizens (PK, 4)	training ground for students	student improvement
SP points to it creating an environment for students that strenghtens the	training ground for students	student improvement
Rubric of a SP is one of the foundational pieces of the goal of the divisio	philosophy of lealrning	learning motive
gives common language, methodology, - student learning is at the cente	philosophy of learning	Learning motive
Connecting SP with student learning and student engagement can be us	training ground for students	student improvement
We are looking at outcome and student learning.The for each of the init	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	Justification
All units of student affairs and academic actually have to		
develop a description that shows what the content of their		
planning is that it is linked to their division plan for student affairs and		
also to the university's strategic plan. (KB, 8)		
	philosophy of learning/pursuit to justify activity k	Justification/Reliance on interconnectedness
student learning will be connected to the strategic plan through assessm	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	Justification/Reliance on interconnectedness
Set learning outcomes as a result of our divisional services and program	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
Set learning outcomes based on assessment outcomes to enhance stude	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
Assessment data, strategic planning, and student learning is a circular th	philosophy of learning/pursuit to justify activity k	justification/learning motive
Major goals of assessment effort to inform practice and decision making	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
Each department required to have an assessment plan and to link asses	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
our student center is one cluster, but has several different departments	decentralized	decentralization
Annual report- the goals dirertly relate to the division strategic plan and	pursuit to justify activity by institutional interaco	reliance on interconnectedness
Student affairs have to show how we are integral into the learning of the	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	reliance on interconnectedness
Everything it supposed to be tied into objectives, leaning objectives in th	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
We couldn't do strategic planning and improve student learning without	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
Best practices in engament and outreach to improve student learning ot	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
people who are on the learning committee and assessment, were also o	decentralized / pursuit to justify activity by institu	reliance on interconnectedness
It is easier to demonstrate the intention of programing with student-em	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
Some of our goal are developing a community cultivating a positive, incl	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
drive for students to learn comes before the assessment and then the		
assessment improves		
the systems (CW, pg 8)		
	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
divisional assessment leads to student learning: focus on ways to study a	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
we just getting to use outcome assessment to support SP (tb,2)		
we had the opportunity to measure leading outcome (WE, p.1)	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
we link the student learning to learning outcomes effort, and departmer	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
We focus on student learning in terms of assessment - looking .. at how	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
I think sometimes a little artificial for dining services to talk about learni	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
Goals of assessment effort are to inform practice and decision making to	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
We use assessment data within the division to make sure students are le	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive
We assess student learning base on what we learn from assessment, wo	pursuit to justify activity by implying student lear	justification/learning motive

Figure 12. Open, axial, and selective categories depicting linkages across cases.

Mystified Purpose

Resultant of the organizational positioning of student affairs divisions across case institutions, student affairs is in competition with academic affairs for resources. Yet student affairs is to support the academic mission of the institution. One student affairs practitioner I spoke with, when asked to describe examples of how divisional strategic planning leads to student learning, was unsure of how to answer. The staff member remarked,

Well, I think… I am not exactly sure how to answer that. I know that part of the Vice-president strategic plan is that we focus on student learning and not just on providing student services. I think that's more to make sure we have a place on the table where the academic colleagues, so she makes clear that she expects different departments to measure learning outcomes, and she has assigned one of her assistants to the vice-president to manage that network and that Jon, who I believe you had been in contact before. How we lead to assisting learning? I don't know if we could draw a direct line other than expectations set that we will set and measure learning outcomes.

Justification

The particular nuances of justification withstanding, assessment, strategic planning, and student learning all share core similarities in relationship to the theme of justification. Performance justification and existence justification discussed above in the summary of assessment across case institutions; activity justification discussed above in the summary of strategic planning across case institutions, and justification discussed above in the summary of learning outcomes across case institutions each explain the pattern of divisional behavior.

Unpreparedness

Despite the fact that respondents referred to pre-existing templates to implement assessment and strategic planning such as CAS, Learning Reconsidered, and other benchmark documents and initiatives, respondents revealed that they were ill equipped. Eddy stated, "Another concern of mine is that we don't measure the inputs. We just measure what they learned at the end of the program, so we don't know if they came in with that skill".

Respondents were clear in that personnel had different ideas about what to do. Patricia stated that her area would, "Create and implement an exit survey for graduating seniors, um…some schools and colleges have that on our campus, others don't". Pat explained,

> I think I make those choices and I look at other people from my department who don't
> necessarily have that buy in to those goals so they only pursue the action plans that are
> detailed in the strategic plan and assigned to them but then there's all this other work that
> they do but they don't focus on those goals.

Student Improvement

Student improvement as discussed above in the summary of learning outcomes across case institutions explains the pattern of divisional behavior.

Learning Motive

Learning motive as discussed above in the summary of learning outcomes across case institutions explains the pattern of divisional behavior.

Reliance on Interconnectedness

Reliance on interconnectedness as discussed above in the summary of learning outcomes across case institutions explains the pattern of divisional behavior.

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Chapter Summary

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Data based themes that arose from cross-case analysis answered the research questions. Divisional assessment processes were linked to student learning with wide variation across institutions. Divisional strategic plan(s) that were linked to student learning also occurred with variation of intensity and approach. Student affairs divisions integrated or linked strategic planning and assessment inconsistently within and across cases, using varied methods.

Individuals involved in divisions' assessment and/or strategic planning were varied due to decentralization. However, committees or taskforces were prevalent. The major responsibilities of these individuals committees and taskforces were set by the bodies themselves or by student affairs leadership. Dependent upon the institution, roles were to guide or supervise processes, and to educate. Common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning include decentralization, justification, a focus on student improvement and learning motives, and reliance on interconnectedness. Conclusions that have been drawn as a result of data and document analysis are discussed in Chapter Four.

CHAPTER 6. SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The chapter is parceled into categories of summary, conclusions, and recommendations. This qualitative multiple site case study sought to determine the extent to which student affairs assessment data are utilized in strategic planning of student learning at six land-grant, *CampusLabs* institutions. Data collection techniques used in this study were respondent interviews and document analysis. At least two interviews from among six accrediting regions were conducted. Respondents varied in title and divisional level. Documents analyzed varied and were chosen from among documents relating to student learning, strategic planning, and assessment. Websites of each case institution were also viewed and underwent the same process as other documents for consideration of inclusion. Chapters 1-5 featured the focus of the study, the literature review, procedures, within case summaries, and results of data analysis and findings. Chapter Six summarizes the study, presents conclusions and offers recommendations for further research.

Summary of Assessment in Student Affairs

Authors that were cited in the literature review related accountability as a major factor for assessment and strategic planning in higher education (Lingenfelter, 2005; Miller & Malandra, 2006; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003b). The intention of accountability is in conflict with the activity scholars reported regarding assessment in Student Affairs. Knight and Yorke (2003) were noted to say that assessment practices represent a 'cottage industry' lacking a systematic theoretical basis for understanding judgments of achievement, and thus "attempts to enhance assessment practices are built on sand" (p. 209). Yet, other scholars purported that all divisional activity, including assessment, is to be supportive of student learning (ACPA & NASPA, 2010; Ellis,

2010) but without explaining the current state of divisional activity. Another author suggests that other ideal conditions should be "student learning produced by the institution in the context of the institution's own mission, its stated learning objectives, and its identified means of assessing student learning" (Beno, 2004, p. 66).

The evidence shows that all the universities in the study were invested in the assessment process. Assessment is exercised almost in every department and all divisions represented in this study. As recommended in the conceptual framework built from the literature review, assessment constitutes multiple methods. Thus, assessment aids the institutional departments to measure what they are doing. Assessment answers questions like - Are they really doing what they said they were going to accomplish? One noted, "What information are we gathering as an institution that would be helpful for us to know".

Summary of Strategic Planning in Student Affairs

Strategic planning has had several roles in history but has occupied a select few roles in student affairs and therefore has a weak basis in the field. According to Ellis (2010), "Several templates exist, such as those created for accreditation purposes, business models, and the public sector (p. 9). "Strategic planning is a formal process designed to help a university identify and maintain an optimal alignment" (Rowley et al., 1997, pp. 14-15). Still, accountability is arguably low, and strategic resource alignment is difficult to verify.

The level and approach of strategic planning varied among case institutions. Some mentioned priority areas or goals they work with during strategic planning. Other case institutions admitted to not having a comprehensive approach or even goals for the strategic planning. Thus, reflecting an operational disjunction of common practices across the case

institutions. There is a lack of uniformity regarding how divisions operate strategic planning and the use the results of strategic planning.

Summary of Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs

As indicated in assessment and strategic planning related literature, literature related to learning indicates "Student affairs professionals are educators who share responsibility with faculty, academic administrators, other staff, and students themselves for creating conditions" (NASPA & ACPA, 2004, p. 2). Although much has been written on student learning in student affairs, authors have failed to explain how to align strategic planning and assessment to such learning.

Summary of Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning Linkages

The literature review emphasized, "student affairs is under considerable pressure to demonstrate its importance and worth" (Upcraft, 2003, p. 558). Fueled by economic recession, rapid technological change, and demographic shifts, scrutiny of student affairs has increased as various constituents express concerns about the field's effectiveness, evidence of student learning, assessment and strategic planning. One author (Middaugh, 2010) suggested addressing the issue by "making highly effective planning decisions grounded in information that has been systemically gathered to support institutional policy" (p. 44). While researchers suggest linkages in silos or dyads (Blimling, 2005; Hamrick et al. 2002), only limited dissertation research (Aloi, 2004) was available to discuss the nature of links between assessment, strategic planning, and student learning.

The Student Affairs leaders took pride on stating that there was a correlation between student learning and planning. Amongst all the institutions, the leaders shared a common student affairs philosophy of preparing student for life. Even though it is difficult to demonstrate how

student affairs are preparing students for life, it is evident that divisions are striving to link their planning to the universities strategic plan and to student engagement.

Assessment seemed to be more controlled than strategic planning. One division in the study did not have a divisional strategic plan. Student affairs units on a regular basis were continuously examining the approach to assessment. Respondents reported working collaboratively on the regular basis. With that said, it was not really clear how often the institutions looked at the link between assessment and strategic planning. Thus, this illustrated that there may be disconnect between strategic planning and student learning. More importantly, it was revealed in some of the divisions that their strategic planning practices, although existent, were not robust.

Summary of Methodology

With a conceptual framework built from the literature review, this study employed a qualitative method, multiple site case study methodology, to examine six case institutions where student affairs professionals deliberately connect assessment, strategic planning, and student learning. The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. How are divisional assessment processes linked to student learning?
2. How are divisional strategic plan(s) linked to student learning?
3. How do student affairs divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment?
4. Who is involved in divisions' assessment and/or strategic planning, and what are the major responsibilities of these individuals?
5. What are common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning?

The instruments used in this study to collect data were the *Criteria to Select Case Study Institutions (*Appendix A), which determined eligible case institutions; the Interview Protocol (Appendix B) that was used to guide the semi-structured interviews with each respondent; and the Document Content Analysis Protocol (Appendix C) that was used to determine inclusion of submitted and publically available documents from case institutions.

Two to five participants from each of the six case institutions were individually interviewed via Skype for approximately one hour using semi structured interviews. Questions built from the literature review and conceptual frame related to the phenomena of linkages between assessment, strategic planning, and student learning within student affairs. Each interview was transcribed immediately following the interview. Each transcript was analyzed in order of open, axial, and selective coding procedures by three coders who developed categories, themes, and assertions from audio and transcribed interviews, and field notes.

Summary of Findings

Analysis of document and interview data revealed several major themes across the units of analyses that included study participants, assessment, strategic planning, learning outcomes, and linkages. Major themes found within the units of analyses of study participants were (a) role restriction and (b) situational variance. Major themes found within the units of analyses of assessment were (a) varied approach to assessment; (b) performance justification; (c) existence justification and; (d) underlying archetype. Major themes found within the unit of analysis of strategic planning were (a) activity justification and connection, and; (b), and varied approach to strategic planning. Major themes found within the unit of analysis of learning outcomes were (a) reliance on interconnectedness; (b) justification; (c) learning motive, and; (d) student improvement. Major themes found within the unit of analysis of linkages were

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(a) decentralization, (b) mystified purpose, (c) justification, (d) unpreparedness, (e) student improvement, (f) learning motive, and (g) reliance on interconnectedness. Some themes are similar across units of analysis suggesting connection, overlap, and strength of themes.

Conclusions

Established from findings presented in chapter five, the conclusions drawn in this final chapter support the literature review, conceptual framework, methodology, data analysis, and answer the major research questions. Themes were presented and discussed in Chapter Four. Conclusions will answer research questions and are expressed throughout in themes associated with each of the following constructs below.

1. Study Participants

2. Assessment in Student Affairs

3. Strategic Planning in Student Affairs

4. Learning Outcomes in Student Affairs

5. Assessment, Strategic planning, and student learning linkages

The conceptual framework of this study stemmed from the literature review that outlined a connected process wherein the dynamics include people, process, timeline, data, creation of student learning, implementation, and evaluation are evident in a successful student affairs environment. Each dynamic in the framework is dependent upon the other.

Research Question One: How Are Divisional Assessment Processes Linked to Student Learning?

Assessment theme A: Varied approach to assessment. Research question one addressed the phenomena of linkages between assessment and student learning and by asking how are divisional assessment processes linked to student learning? The results of this study

illustrate a significant variance in the assessment approaches taken among student affairs divisions. For example, while some divisions use metrics in the assessment process, others use key strategic areas that measure learning. While some units reflect on the success of individual students, other units assess learning in aggregate. Literature supports the latter (Keeling et al., 2008, Huba and Freed, 2000, Middaugh, 2007). Sue from WU stated,

> we focus on the impact on the individual student, um…and we…we maybe can demonstrate really significant personal transformation. But if we're doing um…you know, a leadership development program or a diversity program, and we - and we can't also demonstrate institutional impact, you know, is that the right thing to keep doing?

The implication of this conclusion is that little field-specific solidarity exists in the procedure of units and by extension - institutions to conduct assessment that has common meaning for continuous student learning. In turn resulting in ununiformed cross-divisional assessment procedures determining what or how students are learning from student affairs activity. One respondent noted, "…what we try to do is establish central assessment components that everyone in the division needs to assess; a central recording requirement while allowing units to kind of use their own sort of local knowledge expertise". Another respondent from another division shared "we try to have strategic planning reporting folded into the assessment planning so that really what people are reporting on their metrics, they are reporting on their strategic planning progress". Further, respondents reported assessment as completed in reaction to mandate or threat of loss instead of in support of student learning.

Assessment theme B: Performance justification. The performance justification theme addresses research questions one, three, and five. The practice of justification of performance in student affairs related programs, activities, services, and related spending is well documented.

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Blimling (1999) noted, "A large volume of work demonstrating what students learn in college is available but little of this research shows how student affairs programs and personnel directly influence student outcomes" (p. 54). Evident throughout tag lines, mission and vision statements, annual reports, and assessment plans, document review revealed that divisions referenced themselves as essential to support the academic mission of the institution. This stance is evident in both early and contemporary student affairs literature (American Council on Education, 1937, American Council on Education, 1949, Sandeen & Barr, 2006).

From the findings a conclusion was drawn regarding question one. Divisional assessment processes are linked to student learning by and made relevant through performance justification. Performance justification as a conclusion rests upon interview data and case-specific documents. This type of justification is also well documented in literature that is salient to student affairs (Angelo 1995, Blimling, 1999, Ewell, 2002b, U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

Findings from this study reveal that funding, structure, and social placement are important to justify. Consequently the historic values of the profession of student affairs are incongruent with the true nature of the work, which is to remain financially and socially relevant in the divisional structure. Two respondents were conflicted with how student affairs communicates the worth of their activity. One respondent was noted as saying,

> What proof do we have that learning is happened or has not happened, and then we can look then at the bigger picture: what structure? What support? You know, it needs to be in place in order to improve student learning that if I don't have any really, any data baking up my feeling that this is the right way to go. Then, it makes it really hard to justify that this is the direction that we need to go.

Each respondent varied in their approach to assessment and held choice as to how they would link the assessment process with student learning. Regardless of institution type, there is no explanation of why varied approach occurs or how practitioners chose the method of linking assessment and student learning. In some cases linking was mandatory, but the method of linking remained the choice of the decision maker. Further, although performance is routinely justified, professional skill and experience with assessment and assessment methods also varies among decision makers.

Assessment theme C: Existence justification. From the findings, conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two, three, and four. Findings were supported by and consistent with the assessment theme of performance justification. Regarding research question one, the following conclusions were drawn. Relationships between assessment and student learning as suggested by the conceptual framework are present across cases, but the nature of them is mystified and indistinctive. The literature suggests that these relationships be evident in student affairs. As referenced by Keeling (2004), the transformative process of assessment should fuse with student learning.

> …learning must be reconsidered — that new research, changing times, and needs of today's emerging generations of students require that our traditionally distinct categories of academic learning and student development be fused in an integrated, comprehensive vision of learning as a transformative process that is centered in and responsive to the whole student (p. 35)

Keeling (2004) further posited that every campus resource should be used toward transformative education and assess student learning. Where the disconnect lies in both the literature and the respondent interviews was in furnishing the techniques across divisions to accomplish such

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relationships between assessment and student learning. Respondents insisted that such relationships existed, expressed the need to do so, and attempted speak to how but their conversations were indistinctive and the process they described was mystified. These iterations of indistinctive, mystified discussion can be referred to as existence justification.

There were stances among respondents that ranged from uncertainty, to securing an existence through annual reporting, to a preoccupation with making meaningful connection whenever possible throughout the year. The latter is aligned with the conceptual framework in that assessment practice contains adhering to multiple measures by utilizing connections among people, process, timeline, and data in order to create student learning. A respondent that was uncertain stated,

> We are assuming that there is a connection. We are assuming that how we do what we do, and the fact that we do what we do help students learn. Um… how does the university help students learn? Am I asking that… that's the kind of question that we are trying to address…

Strategic planning theme B: Varied approach to strategic planning. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two, three, and five. Regarding research question one, the following conclusions were drawn. Divisional assessment and strategic planning processes are linked to student learning through varied approaches. This conclusion is congruent with the conceptual framework and the literature in that "No single strategy is sufficient, in and of itself, in describing student learning. Assessment of learning outcomes requires the use of multiple measures to provide adequate evidence of student cognitive gains" (Middaugh, 2010, p. 97). Such varied approaches are evident in the myriad of linking methods reported by respondents during interviews and the documents submitted for

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review. Respondents shared that their approach grew from response to related processes, therefore leveraging the concurrent unit-level operation. One respondent described a process whereby the linking work of each unit influences other unit-level operations.

> I think what we try to do is establish central assessment components that everyone in the division needs to assess; a central recording requirements while allowing units to kind of use their own sort of local knowledge expertise of their own operation to determine kind of content within those assessment areas. So we have, we ask departments to have a set of metrics on which they report. Those metrics are either division/department metrics that everyone is required to reports; strategic metrics that are directly connected to our strategic plan or unit level metrics which really we encouraged and coached people to develop that reflect their own business needs, data is going to be either useful to them as bragging points or for decision making processes

Learning outcomes theme A: Reliance on interconnectedness. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two and five. Regarding research question one, the following conclusions were drawn. Divisional assessment and strategic planning are linked to student learning according to the preference of leadership, which differs across case institutions. Interview data revealed that smaller units operate in an environment where units rely on interconnectedness, are also mandated to contribute but may or may not report their effectiveness as well as larger units. Becca at NWCU reported,

> The division level brings in different units working together that they couldn't accomplish it alone. It takes more than one. You know, it's that whole it takes a village to do some things! Um, I think the unit level is much more unit specific and we kind of roll that data up versus it being a cross divisional effort on some things.

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The conceptual framework illustrated that people, inclusive of the champion of the cause

(Committee on Professional Competencies, 2007, Kuh, 1996) and associated committee

members, clearly operate the assessment process through process, timeline, and data (Middaugh,

2010) by relying on the connection to the divisional champion.

   Learning outcomes theme B: Justification. From the findings conclusions were drawn

regarding research questions one, four, and five. Regarding research question one, the following

conclusion was drawn. Respondents create an atmosphere of constant justification by constant

unit and division change. Movement in the division sustains a semblance of continuous

improvement and positioning resultant of constant defense of student affairs activity.

Practitioners often benchmark anecdotal data to express the worth of their work. Birnbaum,

(2000a) noted,

> Colleges and universities are members of many associations, often voluntary in nature,
>
> that have powerful mimetic (and sometimes even coercive) influence: accrediting
>
> organizations that asses institutional conformance to educational and managerial
>
> standards, national associations that encourage certain institutional roles or activities, and
>
> associations of institutions in specific educational sectors whose members influence each
>
> other through personal contact and the development of formal policy positions. . .The
>
> support of such official and semi-official groups helps to legitimate the fad, thus making
>
> its adoption even more likely. (p. 148)

The attempt at posturing conversational legitimacy and justification also occurred among

respondents. A statement from Marsha at MSU serves as example.

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In our division, um, you know, there is a division wide committee, uh, it happens to be

chaired by, an assistant vice president and my, one of my colleagues, the woman who is

in charge of our departmental assessment is terrific, and so she chairs that.

Eddy, also from MSU participated in such posturing by stating "And one of the things that we

are trying to do with this Student Affairs learning outcomes group is to move more towards

formation and collaboration". Eddy's statement not only evidences the constant unit and division

change, but also the divisional posturing and rhetoric to support such change.

Linkages theme E: Student improvement. From the findings conclusions were drawn

regarding research question one. Regarding research question one, the following conclusions

were drawn. Student affairs practitioners are hard pressed to speak comprehensively on how their

activity creates learning opportunity. Several tools such as CAS have been developed to capture

how students improve, but such tools are not standardized across the profession, or mandatory.

Practitioners easily translate and provide examples of how divisional work shapes development

and behavior improvement. Hesitation and uncertainty arise among practitioners regarding the

student affairs influence on cognitive gains. Mary from NWCU shared her uncertainty by stating,

On been more intentional about what we really want the students to get out of this? And

how do we know that they did? There are still some who continue to do what they do

because they believe that's the right thing to do without having anything to back that up.

So, but I think more and more of my colleagues and I are more intentional.

According to Blimling (1999), "A large volume of work demonstrating what students learn in

college is available but little of this research shows how student affairs programs and personnel

directly influence student outcomes" (p. 54).

Linkages theme F: Learning motive. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one. Regarding research question one, the following conclusions were drawn. Student affairs practitioners support that student learning lies at the center of student affairs activity. Perceptions among participants indicated splintered activity, but singularity of purpose toward student learning. The field of student affairs is devoid of unified practice to operationalize student learning when student learning, as a philosophy is mission-critical. Blimling (1999) argued, "Although many performance-based assessments are devoid of measures of student affairs' efforts to advance student learning, the opportunity exists to expand these measures of assessment" (p. 54).

Research Question Two: How Are Divisional Strategic Plan(S) Linked to Student Learning?

Assessment theme C: Existence justification. From the findings, conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two, three, and four. Findings are supported by and consistent with the assessment theme of performance justification. The following conclusions were drawn in relationship to research question two. Relationships as suggested by the conceptual framework are present, but the nature of them are mystified and indistinctive. Divisional strategic plans at case institutions are more aligned with operational functions than learning experiences resultant of those functions. In contrast, NEU has five strategic priorities of which the first is student engagement that addresses student learning. Second is effectiveness and services delivery that addresses operational functioning. In NEU's case, student learning as existence justification is the first priority integrated into strategic planning, rather than as a secondary afterthought.

Assessment theme D: Underlying archetype. From the findings, conclusions were drawn regarding research questions two and five. Regarding research question two, the following conclusion was drawn. Archetypes are prevalent in student affairs assessment practice as units attempt to repeatedly link student learning and strategic planning in ways that seem to be successful in focusing student learning outcomes. Examples are unit-level annual reports and assessment plans. Some divisions share tenets of reports and plans throughout the entire division, causing rubric-type, fill-in-the-blank work, while other divisions do not. One respondent stated, "And really what I want I'm trying to do is get people to write it down for me so that I have it. So that if I have to fill it in in the accreditation materials or somewhere else. I can simply fill that in". Respondents comments revealed the archetypes as weak in that there is a dearth of sources, and the co-curricular measures that exist are not as well developed as the measures for classroom learning. Sue from Western University was noted as saying,

> So there's some things that we're finding that we would wanna measure that we…that aren't a lot of good models out there and so we're really having to spend some time. Um…thinking about how would we….a…do sound assessment and give us meaningful feedback that could inform the development and measuring of our programs.

Strategic planning theme A: Activity justification and connection. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions two, three, and five. Regarding research question two, the following conclusion was drawn. Practitioners justify through some scientific reporting, but more so through anecdotal reporting regarding learning-focused activities related to divisional strategic planning. According to an NCU respondent,

> But from an operational perspective, we get together in that steering committee meeting um…and kind of make a plan for… Here's how we going to collect all the data, here is

how we going to review all the data, make sure that um…kind of it comes together and

makes sense, and pair each other up to um review the information make sure it matches

goals that have been set out by the division.

Anecdotal justification is flexible and often dependent upon connection to what the divisional

leadership views as salient to the future of the division. Mintzberg (1994) found, "assessment

connects to strategic planning, strategic planning overlooks intuition and esteems "hard" data"

(p. 191). Without evidence of the activity's effectiveness, activities are mainly supported by

anecdotal data to document effectiveness and data are routinely used to justify divisional logic

regarding service delivery. Such logic is likely to be connected to the agenda of the current

leadership, rather than to the holistic student learning philosophy of the profession. Schuh &

Gansemer-Topf (2010) provided accurate context for this conclusion as they stated "the number

of recreational opportunities on campus may be well publicized, but likely to be less available

are data describing who uses the facilities and what students gain from participating in recreation

programs" (p. 12).

Strategic planning theme B: Varied approach to strategic planning. From the

findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two, three, and five.

Regarding research question two, the following conclusion was drawn. Divisional strategic

planning processes are linked to student learning through varied approaches. Such varied

approaches were evident in the myriad of linking methods reported by respondents during

interviews and in the documents submitted for review. Among all case divisions, NCU's linking

method was the most robust as it embedded the strategic plan in the division's 36 assessment

plans wherein learning and service outcomes are color coded. The literature review based

conceptual framework highlighted a prescriptive relationship between strategic planning and student learning but was devoid of methods to accomplish such relationship.

Learning outcomes theme A: Reliance on interconnectedness. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two and five. Regarding research question two, the following conclusion was drawn. Although divisional strategic plans acknowledge the salience of student learning, these plans rarely will explicitly give rise to operationalizing divisional work for increased student learning. Instead, the strategic goals are based on speculation of previous learning. As one participant explained,

> What we hope that they will learn from us is increased um…ethical development and an increased in their ethical decision-making. So that they are making better decisions that are informed by their own values and their own ethics. So when we assess students, if they are not learning what we think that they are, we might set a goal, for example, to do more programs, within the university community, to increase um, students opportunity to engage in ethical discussions. We might set a goal to um, maybe have um, small group discussions in maybe 30 classrooms throughout the course of the semester or throughout the course of the year. So that we can have conversations with students to give them an opportunity to at least examine their ethical decision-making. So that's how we develop our goals, is based on what's lacking like where are our short comings… What are students not learning that we hope that they're learning and then we incorporate that into our goal planning.

Learning outcomes are connected to an ethical dilemma between resource allocation and inexperienced practitioners because "turnover among student affairs professionals continues to be relatively high compared to other units within higher education" (Rosser & Javinar, 2003, p.

825). Strategic plans could explicitly reference and perpetuate student learning if experienced

practitioners were routinely appointed to operationalize the work. Instead, as one NWCU

respondent noted, leadership will "go where the energy is", yielding volunteers as opposed to

appointees. Volunteers are from a wide range of unpredictable skill sets. According to another

respondent,

> Again the first strategic plan that we developed in many years was about 6 years ago, and
> was a ground up foundation-based initiative. Where lower level employees built the plan.
> And so a lot there weren't a lot of department heads on that direct - directors, or anything
> like that. It was with mostly the front – the frontline folks were doing the work.

Learning outcomes theme C: Learning motive. Related to research question two, the

following conclusion was drawn. Grooming individuals at the unit level to participate on

division-level strategic planning committees symbolically links strategic planning and student

learning. Individuals working at the unit level are primarily responsible for maintaining

relationships with students and maintaining documentation thereof. They are also responsible for

creating student learning opportunities. Due to the dual nature of the student affairs personnel

role, practitioners serve as both educator and service delivery personnel. Each of these roles has

different expectations for output, and translates learning to different audiences. Goodwin

describes her role as thus.

> Well, most recently I served on our learning outcome and assessment taskforce at the
> university for the division of student affairs. um. And I did that until I became director
> a…this past September. Um. So, most recently, as the director of the office, I oversee,
> um…learning outcomes and assessment within my unit, which is the office of student

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conduct. And I'm also responsible for strategic planning and goal setting within um…the office of student conduct as the director.

Learning outcomes theme D: Student improvement. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions two and five. Regarding research question two, the following conclusion was drawn. Practitioners are cognizant of the need to increase students' chances to be successful but are unable to identify concrete methods to accomplish this. "A large volume of work demonstrating what students learn in college is available but little of this research shows how student affairs programs and personnel directly influence student outcomes" (Blimling, 1999, p. 54). Respondents continually acknowledged that evidence of learning was difficult for them to learn and strategically recreate.

> In the work that we are doing it does not necessarily tie into learning. Its tied to the fact that we have these twenty thousand students that are here and they need things done. So we are there to meet those – meet those needs. I think in all altruistic world we want to meet those needs by helping students learn, um… but that is not a concerted effort here, I think.

Linkages theme E: Student improvement. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research question one and two. Regarding research question two, the following conclusion was drawn. Student affairs practitioners rely on anecdotal data and traffic data to evidence student improvement. Green, Jones, & Aloi (2008) found that alongside anecdotal evidence and among research conducted, instruments unconnected to the institutional or divisional mission were created at the unit-level to count student numbers, gauge satisfaction, and plan future programming. One respondent shared,

So divisional strategic planning goals work to improve student learning. Specifically many that are directly related to student learning. Um. And others are um…are directly related to supporting the students so that they can learn. Um. So for example, one of our um… one of our priority goals this year was initiate the u matter we care campaign. Which is a um…really broad campaign to get students to, you know, call if they had a friend falling between the cracks and they wanted someone to check on them. Um. Really sort of do their best to provide that, sort of, individual care, um…you know, speak up, be a friend kind of concept. Does that relate to student learning? Where it relates to student learning is it goes back to supporting an individual student, increasing retention, you know, providing some support or resources that the student might need. Um. Which is once again isn't always overly sexy, but its what we do.

Linkages theme F: Learning motive. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one and two. Regarding research question two, the following conclusion was drawn. Student learning is related to strategic plans but is rarely explicitly addressed in strategic planning documents. During document review of case divisions' strategic plans, the words student learning infrequently appears in tandem with strategy or the word strategic. Exposure to divisional power (positional or appointed) can be associated with higher comprehension and capability to strategically connect learning. It was clear across all cases that units self managed in a decentralized manner, allowing unit heads or appointed volunteers from each unit to occupy committee leadership. The literature advised, "conflicts between rank and prestige [that] may weaken administrative authority and increase the difficulties in coordinating activities" (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 20).

Research Question Three: How Do Student Affairs Divisions Integrate or link Strategic Planning and Assessment?

        Study participants theme B: Situational variance. Research questions three and five were addressed by the theme of situational variance. How do student affairs divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment? What are common practices of divisions that successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning? Embedding strategic planning and assessment within job descriptions assured the professionalization and continuous operation of assessment and strategic planning work. Responsibilities of respondents across institutions were widely varied, but each respondent had a portion of their job description that dealt with assessment and/or strategic planning.

        Assessment theme B: Performance justification. The performance justification theme addresses research questions one, three, and five. From the findings a conclusion was drawn regarding question three. Divisional assessment processes are linked to planning and made relevant through performance justification. Each respondent varied in their approach to assessment and held choice as to how they would link the assessment process with strategic planning. In some cases linking was mandatory, but the method of linking remained the choice of the decision maker. Further, professional skill and experience with assessment and/or strategic planning varied among decision makers because they occupied various administrative levels of power. An added conclusion drawn regarding question three demonstrated an agreement among respondents that divisions integrate or link strategic planning and assessment because it is justified by an appointed team or individual who leads strategic planning or assessment efforts. Typically, that team or individual will choose among many assessment instruments, methods of

message delivery regarding assessment implementation and results. Responses like this one were typical across cases.

> In the division we do have a… there is one coordinating committee and there are a few us, the stirring committee who specifically have assessment as our job function and what we do is we try to provide resources to younger professionals or those who don't do assessment as much. Try to help them understand how they may use data.

Assessment theme C: Existence justification. From the findings, conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two, three, and four. Findings were supported by and consistent with the assessment theme of performance justification. Regarding research question three, the following conclusion was drawn. Relationships between strategic planning and assessment as suggested by the conceptual framework are present, but the nature of them are mystified and indistinctive. Existence justification continues despite little demonstration of concrete program effectiveness.

Strategic planning theme A: Activity justification and connection. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions two, three, and five. Regarding research question three, the following conclusion was drawn. Practitioners link strategic planning and assessment by collecting annual data to meet multiple purposes. One respondent reported,

> So, we are collecting evidence and markers to use to show that we in fact do that and some of that is some of the learning that students have. So, we've picked out some units (not all the units) in the division to have some metrics in that area around student learning. We also do it by our assessment plans we have focus on learning outcomes. So rather than a department giving us their entire assessment plan that has a number of people serve, scope of operation; those type of things, we have focused on our assessment

plan and what people turn it to us are just the pieces of student outcomes. So we're right

now in the process of working on ways in which to pull those things together into a report

that shows student learning in support of university goals.

In this process of justification, data collected may provide intention of student learning, assess

whether student learning occurred, and also determine what strategic steps need to be made in

order to improve the results.

      Strategic planning theme B: Varied approach to strategic planning. From the

findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two, three, and five.

Regarding research questions three the following conclusions were drawn. Divisional assessment

and strategic planning processes are linked to student learning through varied approaches.

Linking strategic planning and assessment was also multifaceted and varied in scope and

significance depending on its unit or division vantage point. Prominent methods to link strategic

planning and assessment were first, cross utilization of assessment and strategic planning data.

Second, employing the knowledge of people involved in both assessment and strategic planning

– utilizing them as point persons in the division as a cross-divisional strategy added social

legitimacy to the mechanics of strategic planning. A respondent who serves as the leader of

Student Affairs Research, Evaluation and Planning stated,

      I communicate with the strategic initiative leaders. I communicate with the group as a

      whole. And we also communicate to department heads in our regular meetings and ask

      them to communicate it throughout their department. We also have a communication

      team.

      Linkages theme D: Unpreparedness. From the findings conclusions were drawn

regarding research question three. Regarding research question three, the following conclusion

was drawn. Frequently, student affairs is shown to be unprepared to substantiate learning. Practitioners are reluctant and unfamiliar with evidencing direct connections. Practitioners speak with confidence in describing division level activity in a broad sense but are hesitant to address specific connections from the division level. Benchmark professional resources are not always made available to professionals who have not been adequately prepared to address linking strategic planning and assessment. A Dean of Students at a case institution was noted as stating,

> …we focus on the impact on the individual student, um…and we…we maybe can demonstrate really significant personal transformation. But if we're doing um…you know, a leadership development program or a diversity program, and we - and we can't also demonstrate institutional impact, you know, is that the right thing to keep doing? And um…you know, how – how broad does the impact need to be for it to be something that's a…a…an appropriate investment of resources – you know, that you can really say that this is a divisional program and not um, you know, a very special, selective experience for a very small population.

Research Question Four: Who is Involved in Divisions' Assessment and/or Strategic Planning, and What Are the Major Responsibilities of These Individuals?

  Assessment theme C: Existence justification. From the findings, conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two, three, and four. Findings are supported by and consistent with the assessment theme of performance justification. Regarding research question four, the following conclusions were drawn. Involvement and justification by division leadership proliferates institutional messages indicating healthy strategic planning and assessment activity. In turn, the proliferated messaging creates superficial atmospheric view wherein the division

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appears to be creating deep learning experiences resultant of their activity, but are merely interchanging information without substantial proof of effectiveness. Tom at NEU explained,

> Again the first strategic plan that we developed in many years was about 6 years ago, and was a ground up foundation-based initiative. Where lower level employees built the plan… And so a lot there weren't a lot of department heads on that direct - directors, or anything like that. It was with mostly the front – the frontline folks were doing the work… we had some Vice presidents and department heads on it. Um...and that's worked okay because we knew that we couldn't go to far off the road we'd been on. We also knew we'd have the university academic plan that we needed to show support for.

Within the conceptual framework regarding student affairs assessment, the literature review noted that consistency of process is a characteristic of student affairs assessment as is method multiplicity (Kuh, 2002). In one sense method multiplicity to assess student learning can strengthen varied ways to understand student learning. In another sense, practitioners adhering to the literature in their own practices will have propensity to justify their own methods and existence based on their chosen method.

Learning outcomes theme B: Justification. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, four, and five. Regarding research question four, the following conclusions were drawn. Although selection of such individuals is both random and selective, case divisions depended upon alliance among individuals with complimentary skills. The alliance is intentional in that personnel are deployed based on the institutional capital they possess, which can be leveraged to influence divisional authority. Counter to the intentionality of selective recruitment, some divisions in the study randomly solicited volunteers, regardless of their expertise. This is often practiced among individuals who are often new or ill prepared.

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Whether volunteer or appointed, unit level participants are directly responsible for creating learning outcomes and reporting those outcomes to one or more designees of the division's leadership. Eddy remarked,

> we try to provide resources to younger professionals or those who don't do assessment as much. Try to help them understand how they may use data. Within our department, my job is to encouraged, it is not do all the assessment, but to managed people assessment projects, so I get to help them understand: how to write a questionnaire, or a survey project, how to run a focus group, and then for bigger projects.

Research Question Five: What Are Common Practices of Divisions That Successfully Link Assessment, Strategic Planning, and Student Learning?

Study participants theme A: Role restriction. The professional roles of study participants were utilized to identify the nature of the role restriction construct. The theme of role restriction became clear through the similarity of roles that liaisons choose to submit as interview respondents. Specifically, only middle and senior level professionals served as respondents. Interview data and submitted documents corroborated in that they both spoke to the observable pattern of specified roles submitted by liaisons across all case institutions.

Study participants theme B: Situational variance. Research questions three and five were addressed by the theme of situational variance. Regarding research question five, the following conclusion was drawn. To foster successful linkages, case divisions often included assessment, strategic planning, and student learning in the title and portfolio work of senior student affairs officers. It is this notion of key word inclusion that sustains linking efforts on an ongoing basis. Pat, the Coordinator for Administrative Services and Assessment in the Department of Recreational Sports at SU, explained,

Its only my time and there's not any other…I think maybe the career resource center umm…has a person who has assessment in her title but I think the two of us are the only people with in the division who don't work in the vice president's office who are…who have assessment in as part of their title.

Assessment theme B: Performance justification. The performance justification theme addresses research questions one, three, and five. From the findings a conclusion was drawn regarding question five. Performance justification is manifested through multi-reporting and cross-purpose annual reports, strategic plans, and other public reports generated in tandem with accreditation visits that are leveraged to make links. In keeping with this study's conceptual frame, performance justification includes building credibility, resources, and allies that is congruent with process, timeline, and data embedded in the conceptual framework.

Assessment theme D: Underlying archetype. From the findings, conclusions were drawn regarding research questions two and five. Regarding research question five, the following conclusion was drawn. Student affairs practitioners successfully link assessment, strategic planning, and student learning with the thread of dual and triple reporting that addresses all three areas. This thread of duplicate and triple assessment reporting creates archetypes that operates divisional behavior and results in the intention of connection. Disconnects exist and unit-level divisional behaviors are not always successfully connected so as to benefit student learning. While the procedure and rationale of reporting indicates an intention of purposeful connection between student learning and assessment, actual student learning may go unaffected because the recycled archetypes may be proliferated, but not proven to be effective. Mary, Director of Student Leadership and Involvement at NWCU shared the following;

…each of our departments is required to have an assessment plan and to link the assessment with student learning, and it is very focus on learning outcomes... Each of our departments is responsible for showing assessment how they are linking assessment to whatever they are doing. With every assessment plan we have a plan for the year that we have in writing there is a specific format that we do that in and every assessment plan is reviewed by at least two Assessment Council representatives and then they get feedback to the assessment person for their department and make suggestions, and then, once all that assessment is actually done at the end of the year every department submits an assessment report.

Strategic planning theme A: Activity justification and connection. Regarding research question five, the following conclusion was drawn. Multiple-use reporting supports a divisional philosophy that in the absence of data, everything is opinion – therefore environments without data become vulnerable. However, with a plethora of data that is rarely or never used, divisions become susceptible to ill effective practice. The data collection activity is an extension of the justification theme. Not all data collected is systemically used to result in increased student learning. One participant stated,

I think unfortunately especially at a institutional divisional level we don't look at it enough and we don't respond quickly enough um…and a lot of that is because of the…the collection process. Now you administer a survey one semester you spend another… another semester um…referring to data and trying to draw a conclusions from it and then in the next year you plan on making some kind of changes or impact and at that point you've already lost a fourth of the people that your trying to impact.

Strategic planning theme B: Varied approach to strategic planning. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two, three, and five. Regarding research question five, the following conclusions were drawn. Divisional assessment and strategic planning processes are linked to student learning through varied approaches. Divisions that successfully link develop a common framework that is built upon the values, expertise, and will of the individuals within the division. This is associated to the institutions particular structure and how work is operated in archetypes throughout the division. The professionalizing of archetypes compels practitioners to adapt within the socially constructed framework of the division.

Learning outcomes theme A: Reliance on interconnectedness. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, two and five. Regarding research question five, the following conclusion was drawn. Divisions that make successful linkages often redefine and transform assessment and strategic planning strategy dependent upon data results illuminating cross-unit interconnectivity. Thus, institutions create and refine methods to close the feedback and reporting loop on a regular basis. Such agility allows the division to remain current with divisional and national trends in assessment, student learning, and strategic planning. Literature (Keeling et al., 2008) recommends intuitively and intentionally weaving purposes so that "to create (or measure) that impact, institutions must crosslink vertical programs in meaningful ways that create a continuum of learning" (p. 7). Janae of Southern University contributed,

> So we're really just trying to pick something intentionally, and measure it, and then learn
> from the results. The reality is the volume of activities we do, which means we cannot
> measure everything. And so getting people to stop being overwhelmed and say to them

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pick two activities this semester and one this year. What are you going to measure and do it right? And getting people sort of on-board and comfortable.

Learning outcomes theme B: Justification. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions one, four, and five. Regarding research question five, the following conclusions were drawn. At case institutions justification framed behavior by use of rhetoric from divisional leadership or appointed leadership. In turn, deep structural levels, which created rote operations, were adhered to among people with varying capabilities. Also, self-regulation across unit silos is critical in the justification process. Clear communication through the process of justification to the entire division is important in sharing divisional values, sharing strategic vision, and investing in proliferating messages that incite unit level activity.

According to several respondents, there is a growing obligation for practitioners to warrant quantifiable improvement and to use human agency to improve in spite of internal preparedness and external pressures. Ownership and involvement in the assessment and or strategic planning process was found to be splintered and the method of selectivity capricious due to autonomous justification. Sue from Western University stated,

> …my sense would be that there is a um…a core set of practices that are sort of commonly understood to be best practices that some division's of student affairs embrace…embrace and adopt without testing them with assessment.

Learning outcomes theme D: Student improvement. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research questions two and five. Regarding research question five, the following conclusion was drawn. Divisions successfully provide a conducive atmosphere to create student learning opportunity as information is shared broadly. In those cases, respondents praised their divisional leadership for sharing clear goals. Praise of divisions from respondents

was evident in divisions with clear linkages to student learning. The links were in the form of orientation and training on the division's normalcy in linking assessment, strategic planning and student learning. Successful divisions model what methods are preferred to accomplish student learning while simultaneously enabling opportunity to connect the skills needed to be successful in the division. Another conclusion to be noted is that student improvement is not only conceptualized in terms of cognitive learning, but also in terms of altered behavior resultant of program, unit, or division influence. For example, Eddy remarked,

> We have specific learning outcomes on how they will manage unsporting behaviors? These professional staff have develop a rubric where they can observed students at the end of training and during the season while they are actually out on the field officiating games. How they actually identified them, this behavior. One of the thing they discovered, they were doing a very good job of explaining of the basics. They were not doing as good of a job on explaining how do you then take your knowledge and transfer into a behavior confronting the unsporting behavior. So, they then changed their training program for the next fall to be able to incorporate what they learned from the assessment, in previous year.

Discussion of student improvement as opposed to student learning widened the breadth of dialogue whereby respondents were not only able to address learning acquisition, but also behavior alteration resultant of their work. This theme of student improvement is crucial for practitioners needing to communicate developmental, behavioral and cognitive gains. This is particularly important to student affairs auxiliary units. Betty, a Vice President interviewed explained how important it is for service, or auxiliary units to connect to student learning and improvement.

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It's easier for them to think in terms of student learning. For other units within the division, that's a bit of a challenge, because, um…you know, we have some units, particularly in our auxiliary areas. Like our bookstore, for example, or dining, where, you know, they're a little bit challenged to say. You know, we don't really see um…our main objectives, our main goals its not necessarily about student learning, its about service. Service to the community. And so we challenge them to say, but everything you're doing, if you're working with students in any way you ought to be thinking about how are we helping our students learn and grow in whatever they're doing. So even if they're servers, you know, and working for food service, dining services. So, they're still students that need to grow and learn so what are you putting in place to make sure that they're being really good at their jobs, first of all, so it fits what you're doing? But also, how is this playing into their ability to be successful at the university?

Linkages theme A: Decentralization. Decentralization was identified in all six case divisions as a factor. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research question five. Regarding research question five, the following conclusion was drawn. All components are equally important toward linking assessment, strategic planning, and student learning; therefore, the processes are highly idiosyncratic. The division is responsible for maintaining linkages, rendering the process decentralized. Cross case analysis of document review and interview data clearly illustrate decentralization across cases. The use of decentralization as a way to communicate division-wide messages is significant in establishment of a divisional champion (Committee on Professional Competencies, 2007, Kuh, 1996, Middaugh, 2010) that authors propose is essential to lead the division.

Linkages theme B: Mystified purpose. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research question five. Regarding research question five, the following conclusion was drawn. Mystified purpose lends to student affairs divisions as being ill effective. As both strategic planning and assessment have varied approaches to accomplish success, the purpose for the approach can also be vague at best. Moreover, oftentimes, the language used within planning and assessment can be esoteric, creating more confusion as to the nature of divisional activity.

Linkages theme C: Justification. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research question five. Regarding research question five, the following conclusion was drawn. As has already been stated regarding assessment and strategic planning, justification creates movement in the division whereby a semblance of continuous improvement is maintained.

Linkages theme G: Reliance on interconnectedness. From the findings conclusions were drawn regarding research question five. Regarding research question five, the following conclusion was drawn. Respondents are empowered by their reliance on connectedness as a value. Intentionality of divisional assessment, strategic planning, and student learning synchronization guides overarching unit behavior. Practice is bifurcated and inconsistent but it is guided by a trust that colleagues will follow through.

Recommendations

Data collected could provide the basis for future studies focusing singularly on assessment, or strategic planning, or student learning from one institutional perspective. The research questions and purpose statement could be applied to other types of divisions at institutions other than land grant institutions. The research indicates that strategic planning in student affairs divisions is typically unintentional, weak and loosely connected.

While few institutions in this study effectively implemented strategic plans that were measured in success of beneficial activity, participation was optional and dependent upon the skill and desire of the division's leadership. Therefore, it is recommendation one is for student affairs professionals revisit and identify definitions, both operationally and theoretically, of strategic planning, student learning, and assessment. To the point, student affairs personnel currently operate on presuppositions and take student learning as a given rather than a process. In this manner, institutions may have missed the mark by oversimplifying the task at hand, or at worse convoluted it completely. Therefore, familiarizing foundational definitions and theories will equate to not only better understanding, but also give more accuracy, depth, and credibility to student affairs initiatives.

Recommendation two for further study includes professionalization of student affairs work through credentialing so that more practitioners are familiar with scholarly research and can build instruments to understand how student affairs contributes to learning. Credentialing can be a mechanism to create shared understanding in order for people to develop shared understanding and associated ideas. Divisions waiver in developing and utilizing uniform ways to understand the contribution of student affairs activity to learning. Yet it is widely communicated that student affairs is important to the academic mission of the institution. Diversity of perspectives is what makes robust academic and co-curricular communities and there is merit in differences, as long as they can be communicated.

The findings uncovered by this study are a building block for divisions at land grant institutions who attempt to provide evidence of student learning resultant of their activity. This dissertation has also revealed practices that are of ill effect. Recommendation three is for further research to understand why ill effective practices are continued, and why they do not adhere to

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common practices found within student affairs literature of practice. Since units were found to be in different stages of applying knowledge of how students learn, divisions can synchronize learning across student developmental lines that naturally ebb and flow with the school year.

Since this study utilized multiple-site case study, future study could utilize focus groups to increase sample size. The study also gained divisional leaders via liaisons who assisted in securing respondents. Recommendation five suggests that future studies seek to interview non-leaders such as assessment and strategic planning committee members within units who were heavily referred to in this study as those who moved the institution forward through their dedication to committee work.

Recommendation five relates to practice. Professional associations and accrediting agencies have financial interest and professional obligation to support scholarly research and professional literature that identifies common or best practices. Being that much of the outcome of student affairs work is vague, these two entities can work to see and display techniques and outcomes that clearly demarcate student learning or, at best, the intention thereof within strategic plans and assessment documents.

The sixth and final recommendation for practice is to use divisional funding models to drive desired outcomes of connections between assessment, strategic planning and student learning. Among the practitioners interviewed, none related their activity back to budget. None expressed previous or future loss of funding if found that students did not learn from their unit's activity. As practitioners are equipped with understanding field-related literature, connecting dollars to performance can raise an atmosphere of motivation and professional astuteness.

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APPENDIX A. CRITERIA TO SELECT CASE STUDY INSTITUTIONS
(Adapted in part from Aloi's (2004) Review of Plans Criteria & Green's (2006) Case Study Site
Selection Criteria—Indicators of Excellence)

Institution's Name:	
Accrediting Body Code Choice: (Middle States), (NEASC), (North Central), (NWCCU), (SACS), (WASC)	
Source of Assessment OR Strategic Plan Review:	
CRITERION	
Student Affairs Assessment Structure Includes:	Yes/No
Student affairs assessment unit (1)	
Identified a director/coordinator/facilitator of assessment efforts (1)	
Assessment committee/council (1)	
Professional assessment development/educational opportunities (1)	
Evidence of professional education about student affairs assessment (1)	
Evident process design (1)	
Apparent implementation (1)	
Evident reporting (1)	
Comprehensive and/or Unit Level Student Affairs Assessment Plans and Reports Demonstrate:	Yes/No
Reporting procedures in place to link assessment and strategic planning (1)	
Assessment results clearly tied with strategic planning (1)	
Demonstrates accountability to stakeholders (1)	
Fully developed assessment plans (1)	
Fully implemented assessment plans (1)	
Flows from institutional and divisional mission and objectives (1)	
Clear purpose (1)	
Conceptual framework evident (1)	
Clearly articulated learning outcomes (1)	
Evidence of student affairs practitioners' ownership/responsibility (1)	
Evidence of divisional support (1)	
Short-term and long-term assessment timeline for planning assessments (1)	

Comprehensive and/or Unit Level Student Affairs Assessment Plans and Reports Demonstrate:	Yes/No
Short-term and long-term assessment timeline for implementing assessments (1)	
Short-term and long-term assessment timeline for reporting assessment results (1)	
Identification of individual(s) responsible for assessment planning (1)	
Identification of individual(s) responsible for implementing assessments (1)	
Identification of individual(s) responsible analyzing data (1)	
Identification of individual(s) responsible for creating strategic plans (1)	
Identification of individual(s) responsible for implementing strategic plans (1)	
Identification of individual(s) responsible for reporting assessment results (1)	
Use of multiple methods to assess learning outcomes (1)	
Identification of assessment participants (1)	
Identification of when those participants will be assessed (1)	
Assessment feedback to appropriate audiences (1)	
Collaboration within the division (1)	
Collaboration outside the division (1)	
Student Learning evident (1)	
Plan used to evidence & enhance student learning (1)	
Plan for evaluation of assessment process and plan(s) (1)	
Demonstrates improvement such as revised student affairs curriculum (1)	
Institution Criteria Includes:	Yes/No
Land-Grant Institution (1)	
CampusLabs Participating Institution (1)	

APPENDIX B. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

In case of questions or concerns about this research contact:
Principle Investigator, Myron Eighmy, Myron.Eighmy@ndsu.edu, 701-231-5775, or, Co-
Investigator, Malika Carter, Malika.carter@my.ndsu.edu, 802-999-8029.

In case of questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject or to file a complaint
regarding this research, contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Office, 701-231-8908, or
ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu.

My name is Malika Carter. I am a doctoral student at North Dakota State University, majoring in
Institutional Analysis.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in my project studying the use of assessment data in
strategic planning toward student learning within the field of student affairs.
Interviewing individuals, such as yourself, who participate in your division's assessment and/or
strategic planning processes will help me investigate how these processes are linked and the
benefits of this to your division. My goal is to glean best student affairs practices of linking
assessment data to strategic planning in ways that enhance student learning.

North Dakota State University Institutional Review Board and officials of your institution have
accepted my request to conduct this dissertation study. The information gathered in my research
will be used in my doctoral dissertation.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you do not have to respond to every question. You
have my assurance that your responses will remain private, and that confidentiality will be
maintained throughout the data collection and reporting processes.

Voice and image of participants will be captured via Skype-based interviews. As a back up, the
voice of participants will be recorded onto a digital recorder during the Skype call, and the voice
recording will be transcribed to text. The information recorded for the interview will be stored on
the researchers computer and digital recorder and will be destroyed after 10/2012.

Do I have your permission to record this interview and take notes to ensure the accuracy of your
responses? _____yes _____ no

1.   Please state your specific unit within student affairs_____ and the
        number of years you have been at this institution: _____ (RQ 4)
2.   Please tell me a little bit about your role(s) in Student Affairs Assessment, Strategic
        Planning or both _____(RQ 4)
3.   Paint me a picture of how assessment operates in your division? (RQ 5)
4.   How does the strategic planning process operate in your division? (RQ 3, 5)
        a.   (ask if major goals are not addressed by the answer to question 4) What are the major
             goals of your division's strategic plan? (RQ 2)
        b.   (ask if major goals are not addressed by the answer to question 3) What are the major
             goals of your division's assessment efforts? (RQ 1, 3)

5. According to prominent student affairs literature, student affairs divisions should have certain criteria that links student learning to assessment and strategic planning. I am curious to hear how the division of student affairs at [institution] intentionally links assessment, strategic planning and student learning? Can you tell me more about that? (RQ 5)
    a. (ask if communication is not addressed by the answer to question 5) How is strategic planning information shared or communicated on campus? (RQ 5)
    b. (ask if communication is not addressed by the answer to question 5) Tell me about how assessment data is shared or communicated on campus? (RQ 5)
6. Please describe examples of how divisional strategic planning leads to student learning? (RQ 2)
7. Please describe examples of how divisional assessment leads to student learning? (RQ 1)
8. Explain how assessment data is used in strategic planning to improve student learning. (RQ 1, 2, 3)
9. What form of assessment data is most relevant to strategic planning? (RQ 3, 5)
10. (ask if answer is not addressed by question 6) Please explain how divisional strategic planning goals improve student learning? (RQ 2, 4)
11. (ask if answer is not addressed by question 7) How do divisional assessment goals improve student learning? (RQ 1)
12. Who is involved in the division's strategic planning process? (RQ 4)
    a. What are the major responsibilities of these individuals?
13. Who is involved in the division's assessment process?
    a. What are the major responsibilities of these individuals? (RQ 4)

APPENDIX C. DOCUMENT CONTENT ANALYSIS PROTOCOL

Institution: _____ Date of analysis: _____

Title of document: _____

Author of document: _____ Date of document: _____

Author's qualifications: _____

Source of publication: _____

Method of procurement: _____

Intended audience: _____

Length: _____ Format/style: _____

Description of Content:

Contribution to study:

Strategic Planning: How well does the document address the following issues?
1. The major goals of the division's strategic plan.
   ☐very well   ☐not very well
2. How the strategic plan flows from the division's mission statement.
   ☐very well   ☐not very well
3. The purpose of the strategic plan. Is this clear?
   ☐very clear   ☐not very clear
4. The conceptual framework for strategic planning?
   ☐very well   ☐not very well
5. Who is primarily responsible for strategic planning? What are their responsibilities?
6. Evidence of division-wide support for strategic planning.
   ☐very well   ☐not very well
7. Staff development provided that enables participation in strategic planning.
   ☐very clear   ☐not very clear
8. Incentives or rewards provided for staff who participate in strategic planning.
   ☐very clear   ☐not very clear
9. Shares or communicates information about the strategic planning process to
   members of the campus community.
   ☐very well   ☐not very well
10. Provides feedback to appropriate external constituencies.
    ☐very well   ☐not very well
11. Demonstrates accountability to stakeholders.
    ☐very well   ☐not very well
12. Contains an improvement made based on strategic planning. Describe this
    improvement.
    ☐very well   ☐not very well
13. Evaluates the strategic planning process. How?
    ☐very well   ☐not very well

Assessment Process: How does the document address the following issues?
14. The major goals of the division's assessment plan.
    ☐very well   ☐not very well

15. How the assessment plan flows from the division's mission statement.
☐ very well   ☐ not very well
16. The purpose of the assessment plan. Is this clear?
☐ very clear   ☐ not very clear
17. The conceptual framework for assessment.
☐ very clear   ☐ not very clear
18. Who is responsible for assessment? What are their specific responsibilities?
19. How does staff participate in assessment?
☐ very clear   ☐ not very clear
20. Evidence of division-wide support for assessment.
☐ very clear   ☐ not very clear
21. Staff development provided that enables participation in assessment process.
☐ very well   ☐ not very well
22. Incentives or rewards provided for staff participating in assessment.
☐ very clear   ☐ not very clear
23. Shares or communicates information about assessment to members of the campus community.
☐ very well   ☐ not very well
24. Provides feedback from assessment data to appropriate external constituencies.
☐ very well   ☐ not very well
25. Demonstrates accountability to stakeholders.
☐ very well   ☐ not very well
26. Contains an improvement made due to assessment data. Describe this improvement.
☐ very well   ☐ not very well
27. Evaluates the assessment process. How?
☐ very well   ☐ not very well

Linkages: How does the document address the following issues?
28. Reporting procedures that link assessment and planning.
29. Assessment results are clearly tied to strategic planning. How?
30. Assessment data are used to inform student learning practice. If yes, What type of data are used?
31. Assessment data are used to make improvement in student affairs programming. What type of data are used?
32. Assessment data are used in making budget decisions. What type of data are used?

APPENDIX D. EMAIL TO REQUEST INSTITUTIONAL SITE APPROVAL

Email to request institutional site approval (IRB approval)
(on NDSU letterhead)

Date

Address

Dear Dr. Whomever:

I am hoping that you can assist me in securing permission to communicate with your institution as part of my dissertation study on student affairs' use of assessment data in strategic planning toward student learning. This email will outline the purposes of my Skype-based interview and the steps necessary to obtain written approval to conduct this research on your campus.

Specifically, I am requesting your permission to interview approximately 3-5 individuals at your institution who are involved with either or both the assessment program and the strategic planning process. I will also be analyzing relevant documents, such as meeting minutes, memos, planning documents, etc. that will enhance my understanding of assessment and strategic planning as they function in the division of student affairs at your school.

Once I have received institutional permission, I will communicate with student affairs leadership so as to have a liaison on your campus to assist in arranging the interviews and obtaining appropriate documents for review. I am planning to conduct Skype-based interviews during the months of October and November. The protocol is attached for your review.

The intent of my research project is to cull best practices in moving from assessment to strategic planning toward student learning from student affairs divisions, like the one at your institution, that have productive planning and assessment processes and demonstrated success in linking the two. The analysis of my data will result in a synthesis of best practices, as well as cautions, to be shared with institutional planners and other interested individuals as a model for colleges and universities to follow in developing or modifying their own planning processes.

I am attaching a letter template, which you may alter as you prefer, and then copy on your institutional letterhead. Please forward this letter to me by September 15th so that I may proceed with my study. Once I receive this letter of consent from you and after all acceptances have been granted, I will schedule the interviews on your campus, with the assistance of the campus liaison. I have received permission from my home institution for this study (please see attached for documentation).

I want to assure you that the results of this study will be used specifically for my dissertation, and that I will maintain confidentiality of data and preserve the confidentiality of the interviewees at all times. It will also be made clear to all participants at your institution that their involvement in this project is entirely voluntary. Because the results of this study may contain information that could improve your institution's effectiveness, I will gladly share an executive summary of the study with you or any of the participants upon request.

Should you have any questions or concerns regarding this process, please feel free to contact me by phone (802.999.8029) or e-mail (malika.carter@my.ndsu.edu). I look forward to interviewing on your campus via Skype.

Please advise,

Malika "MC" Carter
Doctoral Student
North Dakota State University
802-999-8029

APPENDIX E. LETTER FROM INSTITUTION GRANTING PERMISSION FOR

SKYPE-BASED INTERVIEW

Letter from institution granting permission for Skype-Based Interview (From IRB approver)

(On letterhead from case institution)

Date

Ms. Malika "MC" Carter
Address

Dear Malika:

I am writing to convey my support for your doctoral dissertation research at ___(name of institution)___. I understand that you will need to interview various members of our faculty and staff to discuss the assessment and strategic planning processes at our institution. In addition, I realize that you will be provided with various documents related to both processes that will contribute to your analysis.

It is my understanding that you will schedule individual appointments of approximately 45-60 minutes each, in advance, with faculty and staff sometime during MONTH or MONTH 2010 via Skype. You have agreed to emphasize to these individuals that their participation is entirely voluntary. I also understand that you will protect the confidentiality of these discussions; neither the participants nor our institution will be identified in your dissertation.

Thank you for soliciting my input and approval for this project. I wish you much success in this endeavor.

Sincerely,

Dr. Whomever has authority to grant institutional approval
His or Her Title

APPENDIX F. LETTER TO INSTITUTIONAL LIAISON

Letter to liaisons at participating institutions
(on NDSU letterhead)

Date

Address

Dear __(liaison's name)__:

Thank you for agreeing to serve as liaison for my dissertation research at (name of institution). [OR – I have received permission to conduct Skype-based research on your campus (see attached)]. I greatly appreciate your assistance as I determine your student affairs division's role in assessment data, strategic planning, and student learning at your institution. I am writing to outline the specifics of my research on your campus and to clarify your participation.

I am planning to electronically interview on your campus via Skype on __(date of visit)_, and would like to interview 3 to 5 administrators, faculty, or staff who are active participants in either or both your assessment program(s) and strategic planning process. In addition, I would like to review documents relevant to both processes, such as meeting agendas and minutes, reports, campus communications, planning documents, etc.
Interviews will last 45-60 minutes.

I want to emphasize that the results of this study will be used specifically for my dissertation, and that I will maintain confidentiality of data and preserve the privacy of the interviewees at all times. With this letter, I am requesting that you supply me with a list of individuals you believe can contribute to my study from which I can request appointments for interviews. Please also send my information to them. To adhere to my research schedule, please provide this information by _(date)_. I will also need your assistance in obtaining relevant documents, which you may forward to me in advance or help me locate.

I greatly appreciate the willingness of your institution to participate in my study, and am grateful that you have agreed to assist with the arrangements for my site research. I look forward to interviewing professionals on your campus via Skype in __(month of visit)___. Please advise.

Sincerely,
Malika "MC" Carter
Doctoral Student
North Dakota State University
(802) 999-8029
Malika.carter@my.ndsu.edu

Attachment to Letter to Institutional Liaison

Interview Participants: The following individuals could be recruited for interviews.
- Assessment Director
- Vice President or Vice Chancellor of Student Affairs
- Directors of Student Affairs Departments OR Institutional Research
- Dean of Student Affairs or Student Life
- Strategic planning committee members, and
- Student affairs personnel instrumental in assessment and/or strategic planning

Relevant Documents: The following documents will be helpful to assist in analysis of assessment and planning processes.
- Strategic Plan
- Assessment Plan
- Strategic Planning Committee membership list
- Assessment Committee membership list
- Organizational Charts for Assessment Program, Institutional Research Office, and
- Student Affairs division(s)

APPENDIX G. LETTER TO REQUEST INDIVIDUAL SUBJECT PARTICIPATION

Letter to invite participants
(on NDSU letterhead)

Date

Address

Dear Colleague:

You are invited to participate in a research study under the direction of Dr. Myron Eighmy of the Institutional Analysis Program in the Department of Education at North Dakota State University. The purpose of this study is to determine the role of student affairs in using assessment data and strategic planning to facilitate student learning. Because of its efforts to link assessment and planning and student learning, __(name of institution)___ has been selected as a site for my research.

Based on your role in assessment and/or planning at your institution, you have been recommended to me as a participant by __(name of liaison)__, who has kindly agreed to serve as campus liaison for my research.

The intent of my research project is to cull best practices in integrating assessment with strategic planning and student learning from divisions, like yours, that have productive planning and assessment processes and demonstrated success in linking the two. The analysis of my data will result in a synthesis of best practices, as well as cautions, to be shared with divisional planners and other interested individuals as a model for student affairs divisions to follow in developing or modifying their own planning processes. I will be interviewing on your campus via Skype __(dates of visit)__ and would like to interview you for approximately 45 minutes via Skype regarding your role in your institution's assessment and/or planning processes.

Your responses will remain confidential, and I will preserve the privacy of the interviewees at all times. I also want to emphasize that your participation in my study is entirely voluntary and that you may withdraw your consent at any time. Because the results of this study may contain information that could improve your institution's effectiveness, I will gladly share an executive summary of the study with you upon request.

Please indicate your agreement to participate in my study by contacting me by telephone (802.999.8029) or email (Malika.carter@my.ndsu.edu) to schedule our Skype-based interview. In the meantime, please do not hesitate to contact me should you have any questions or wish to discuss further details of my study. I look forward to hearing from you soon.

Sincerely,
Malika "MC" Carter
Doctoral Student
North Dakota State University
(802) 999-8029
Malika.carter@my.ndsu.edu

APPENDIX H. REMINDER EMAIL

On DATE, you received an email from me inviting you to participate in a study that determines the role of student affairs in using assessment data and strategic planning to facilitate student learning.

Your participation is greatly appreciated.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at telephone number 802- 999-8029 or via email at malika.carter@my.ndsu.edu.

Again, thank you for your participation!

Malika Carter
Doctoral Candidate in Institutional Analysis, North Dakota State University

APPENDIX I. FINAL REMINDER EMAIL

This is a final invitation to participate in a study that determines the role of student affairs in using assessment data and strategic planning to facilitate student learning. Data collection will close on DATE.

I greatly appreciate your participation.

If you have any questions about the study, please contact me at telephone number 802- 999-8029 or via email at malika.carter@my.ndsu.edu.

Again, thank you for your participation!

Malika Carter
Doctoral Candidate in Institutional Analysis, North Dakota State University

APPENDIX J. THIRTY-FIVE AREAS SUCH AS OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT AND

PROGRAM EVALUATION AS FOUND IN CAS PROFESSIONAL STANDARDS FOR

HIGHER EDUCATION 7TH EDITION

1. Academic Advising
2. Admission Programs
3. Alcohol, Tobacco, and Other Drug Programs
4. Campus Activities Programs
5. Campus Information and Visitor Services
6. Campus Religious and Spiritual Programs
7. Career Services
8. Clinical Health Programs
9. College Honor Societies
10. College Unions
11. Commuter and Off-Campus Living Programs
12. Conference and Events Programs
13. Counseling Services
14. Disability Support Services
15. Distance Education Programs
16. Education Abroad Programs and Services
17. Financial Aid
18. Fraternity and Sorority Advising Programs
19. Health Promotion Programs
20. Housing and Residential Life Programs
21. International Student Programs
22. Internship Programs
23. Learning Assistance Programs
24. Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, and Transgender Programs
25. Multicultural Student Programs and Services
26. Orientation Programs
27. Outcomes Assessment and Program Evaluation
28. Recreational Sports Programs
29. Registrar Programs and Services
30. Service-Learning Programs
31. Student Conduct Programs
32. Student Leadership Programs
33. TRIO and Other Educational Opportunity Programs
34. Women Student Programs
35. Master's Level Student Affairs Administration Preparation Programs

APPENDIX K. RESEARCHER AS PRIMARY INSTRUMENT STATEMENT

The question "Is it fair?" pervades my intellectual thought, research agendas, and my lived experience. My professional passion for justice within institutions became pronounced in 2005 as I earned a masters degree in Higher Education and Student Affairs Administration and secured a position in the Multicultural Student Services department at NDSU. Opportunity to become instrumental in institutional fairness and accountability complimented my personal and professional roles.

As I was helping a student inquiring about a university service, he brought up the concept of "doing what you have to do". A phrase routinely conversationally framed as a negative term connoting dishonesty and lack of integrity. Nonetheless, I was able to convey to him my definition of leadership and the fond memories of determination, grit, and gumption that have shaped me.

The definition of integrity as provided by the author, Stephen Carter (1995) is one that I have adopted as my definition of leadership. On page 10 of his book *Integrity*, Carter uncovered three steps to define integrity. In step two and three he articulates (integrity) "demands a difficult process of discerning one's deepest understanding of right and wrong, and then further requires action consistent with what one has learned" (p. 10), and (3) "saying publicly that we are doing what we think is right, even when others disagree" (p. 11).

Systemic community and institutional change occurs as people with power influence systems. I measure my impact by systemic changes that transpire in research agendas, policies, and practice. However, changes in research agendas, policies and practice are not in themselves sufficient to bring about improvement for disenfranchised people within institutions. Much

depends on the nature of social relationships within institutions, between institution and community, in research-based partnerships, and the creation of shared purpose.

Each year, three thousand plus U.S. institutions of higher education go about the business of education for the public good. As a scholar and student affairs professional, called to connect and understand practice within institutions, it is important that I supplement the aforementioned professional maneuvering with scholarly understanding of institutional mechanics. It is my hope that my research topic, *Study of Assessment Data Usage In Student Affairs-Related Strategic Planning and Student Learning*, will assist in that pursuit. As I grow as a professional and as a scholar, I plan to use my research agenda to explore accountability in higher education, seek out how I can work professionally bridging government and higher education towards more accountability and the proving of students' transitional learning.

APPENDIX L. PILOT INTERVIEW MODERATOR OUTLINE

The following guide was employed during the pilot interviews:
I. Introduction
   a. Explain purpose of the study and that their specific answers to the questions will not be used in the study, rather any feedback about the methods or procedures will be used to enhance the methodology of the study.
   b. Introduce self and rationale behind wanting to study this topic
   c. Read Instrument protocol explaining the voluntary nature of this interview and that participant may stop at anytime (stopping at "do I have your permission to record this interview")

II. Participant Background
   a. Move through protocol preliminary questions regarding current job title, and of what their position entails.
   b. Ask questions 1-13.
   c. Read through solicitation letters.

III. Further questions and closing
   a. Reemphasize the confidentiality of the information shared.
   b. Ask if the participant is available for follow up if something needs to be clarified.
   c. Ask if there are any questions that should be altered.
   d. Ask if any of the solicitation letters should be altered and/or are they clear to the reader.
   e. Thank them for their time.