

ASSESSMENT DISPOSITION: QUALITIES AND STRATEGIES FOR DEVELOPMENT  
IN STUDENT-AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

A Dissertation  
Submitted to the Graduate Faculty  
of the  
North Dakota State University  
of Agriculture and Applied Science

By

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In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
for the Degree of  
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Major Program:  
Education

April 2017

Fargo, North Dakota

North Dakota State University  
Graduate School

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**Title**

ASSESSMENT DISPOSITION: QUALITIES AND STRATEGIES FOR  
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**DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Because accountability in higher education has increased significantly, the need for effective assessment practice has also increased. Higher-education personnel, including student-affairs professionals, must be prepared to effectively incorporate assessment with their daily work, not only to address the accountability demands, but also to continue improving efforts that facilitate student growth and learning. While the student-affairs profession has placed assessment and assessment practice as a central issue by prioritizing resources towards professional development in this area, student-affairs professionals are falling short in their ability to integrate assessment into practice. This Delphi study explored the student-affairs assessment disposition, its characteristics, and the ways it can be developed. A small panel of student-affairs assessment experts were interviewed to develop a Delphi survey that was facilitated with a larger panel of assessment experts from institutions across the United States. Consensus of agreement was reached after three survey iterations on 41 qualities that define the qualities of a student-affairs professional with an assessment disposition and 40 actions or conditions that could contribute to the development of an assessment disposition.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Although it is my name on the title page of this dissertation, there is an entire village of others who deserve credit and thanks for helping and supporting me along the way. I want to acknowledge members of my dissertation committee, Dr. Chris Ray, Dr. Laura Oster-Aaland, Dr. Nate Wood, Dr. Amy Rupiper Taggart, and the late Dr. William Slinger. Each time we met I felt that you were on my side and wanting only the best outcome for me. Thank you for your mentorship, advice, challenge, and support. I want to especially thank Dr. Laura Oster-Aaland, my first assessment collaborator and my long-time friend. Your constant support and encouragement are invaluable to me. To my advisor, Dr. Chris Ray, thank you for your willingness to take this journey with me. You have prompted many “ah ha” moments. Thank you for your guidance and belief in me.

Many friends and colleagues have been part of my entire educational journey. Thank you for asking about my doctoral work, cheering for me throughout this process, and celebrating the milestones with me. Dr. Bill Frazier, my friend and colleague, your periodic accountability check-ins always came at the right time and were continually followed-up with reassurance and care. Paul Karlson, my friend of 30 years and my “study-buddy” for the past 3 years—thank you for showing up each week. You not only helped me stay focused on my dissertation, but you also kept me focused on life and the things that matter most. The Winfrey Family (Collette, Steve, Amelia, and Scarlett)—thank you for welcoming me as an honorary member of your family and providing a Fargo home-away-from-home. Your love and care go way beyond my doctoral work. I am so grateful to have you in my life.

## **DEDICATION**

I dedicate this dissertation to my sister, Shirley. You are truly my friend and my family. You are a role model of perseverance and, in many ways, my first teacher. Remember those lessons and lectures around the kitchen table? I am extremely blessed by your presence in my life. Thank you for your on-going love and support. And know that I forgive you for that time you would not share your Lik-a-Stix candy with me.

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## CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

The United States government has set a goal that, by 2020, the country will have the highest proportion of college graduates in the world (The White House, 2015). In 2009, when the American higher-education goal was first set, the United States ranked 12th (The White House, 2015). In 2011, the United States ranked 16th in the proportion of college graduates (deVise, 2011). Other countries are also investing in higher education, and are outperforming the United States in the production of college graduates. To reach the goal, American institutions are challenged to make higher education more affordable while meeting higher expectations to improve overall quality.

Meeting these challenges requires a precision in decision making and an assessment of student outcomes that were not previously expected from higher-education leaders. Precipitated by a new reality in American higher education, assessment has been described as a “game changer” (Miller, 2012, p. 8). Sandeen and Barr (2006) have called assessment the “most powerful movement in American higher education” (p. 154). In 2008, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) established a set of principles and commitments to improve student learning and accountability, making it clear that excellence for college students’ learning is mainly the responsibility of the institutions of higher education. This commitment includes setting ambitious goals, gathering evidence regarding how institutions are reaching these goals, and being transparent with progress. Institutions must be engaged in assessment to evaluate programs and services, as well make efforts to use the results to improve practice and outcomes that essentially improve student learning (AACU & CHEA, 2008).

The increasing levels of accountability and the demands for quality exist in all areas of higher education, including student affairs. Student affairs plays an important role in educational student outcomes and must also play a significant role during institutional assessment. Data-driven professional practice was identified as a crucial component of the student-affairs profession since its early beginnings, using the terms *research* and *evaluation* for what would be considered *assessment* today. The authors of *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937) identified research as an essential part of the profession, particularly research that seeks to understand student learning that takes place outside the classroom. Engaging student-affairs professionals in research as a means of continual growth and improvement was reemphasized in the 1949 version of *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education Studies, 1949), and the practice of evaluation was introduced as follows:

The principal responsibility of all personnel workers lies in the area of progressive program development. Essentially, this means each worker must devote a large part of his time to the formulation of new plans and to the continuous evaluation and improvement of current programs. The test of effectiveness of any personnel service lies in the differences it makes in the development of individual students, and every worker must develop his own workaday yardstick for evaluation. (p. 33)

The writers continued to encourage conducting satisfaction studies, tracking the usage of facilities and programs, and assessing the effectiveness of personnel training programs. To some degree, the 1949 document fell short of today's complex assessment needs, but the foundational ideals are very relevant to the contemporary climate. The emphasis that all student-affairs professionals must be engaged in assessment is especially noteworthy.

In recent years, assessment (Sandeem & Barr, 2006; Schuh, 2009; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996) and student learning (ACPA, 1996; ACPA & NASPA, 1998; M. J. Bresciani, 2009-2010;

NASPA & ACPA, 2004; Sandeen & Barr, 2006) have been identified as central to the present-day work of student-affairs professionals. These goals exist within an increasingly complex higher-education system that includes a more diverse student body, higher levels of complexity for student issues, increasing use of technology, and expanded globalization (Tull & Kuk, 2012). Simultaneously, higher education, including student affairs, is facing greater levels of accountability, demands to increase student retention, changing accreditation standards, increased competition, and limited resources that drive a need to do more with less (Lovell & Kosten, 2000; Schuh, 2009). Blimling (2013) summed up many of the arguments regarding why it is so important that student-affairs professionals become competent and actively engaged in institutional assessment.

In the current climate of accountability, student affairs needs to be able to show how it contributes to the education of students, why its programs are important to students' education, why the investment in student affairs facilities and programs is worth the increased cost to students, and what system of performance measures is in place to ensure that students' money is spent efficiently. To answer these questions, student affairs administrators need to make assessment a routine part of what they do. Even if the demand for this data has not yet occurred for a particular student affairs organization, it is only a matter of time until the current climate of accountability in higher education turns more of its attention to the work of student affairs. When it does, student affairs professionals need to be able to answer with empirical data about their stewardship of student money and their contributions to student life and learning. (p. 13)

This statement supported the premise that assessment practice is one of the most critical issues in student affairs today (Sandeen & Barr, 2006).

### **Background of the Problem**

Assessment is an essential part of student-affairs work, and in recent years, it has moved from being just a good or recommended idea to becoming a necessary component for the survival of the student-affairs profession and, more importantly, for the success of higher

education. However, student-affairs professionals at all levels have found it difficult to incorporate effective assessment into daily practice (Blimling, 2013; M. J. Bresciani, Gardner, & Hickmott, 2009; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Payne & Miller, 2009; Piper, 2007; Roberts, 2012; Slager & Oaks, 2013). To address these challenges, student-affairs professionals, institutions, and professional organizations have worked to build professional-competency models for assessment as well as to foster cultures where assessment work is expected and supported. However, empirical evidence suggests that these efforts may not be enough.

In 2006, the ACPA's Commission on Assessment for Student Development Directorate wrote *Assessment, Skills, and Knowledge Content Standards* (ACPA, 2006), commonly referred to as the ASK Standards. These standards were developed in consultation with members across the organization and focus on the competencies that are necessary for effective assessment practice in student affairs. The ASK Standards were created in response to public calls for higher-education improvement that were cited in publications such as *Greater Expectations: A New Vision for Learning as a Nation Goes to College* (Association of American Colleges and Universities, 2002), *Measuring Up 2004: The National Report Card on Higher Education* (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2004), and *Declining by Degrees: Higher Education at Risk* (Hersh & Merrow, 2005). Other national and international organizations that often fall under the divisions of student affairs developed their own sets of competencies, each with some form of assessment competency. These organizations included the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International's (ACUHO-I, 2012) *Core Competencies: The Body of Knowledge for Campus Housing Professionals*, the Association of College Unions International's (ACUI, 2008) *Core Competencies for the College Union and Student Activities Profession*, the National Association for College Admission Counseling's

(NACAC, 2000) *Statement on Counselor Competencies*, and the National Association of College Stores' (NACS, 2006) *College Store Competency Model*.

In 2010, ACPA and NASPA jointly created a set of overall *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners* (ACPA & NASPA, 2010). The professional competency areas were developed by a joint task force that conducted an extensive review of research and literature, considered a summary of earlier reports and proposals regarding student-affairs professional competencies (Weiner, Bresciani, Oyler, & Felix, 2011), and incorporated input and feedback from leaders and other members of each association. Many of the ASK Standards were included in the competency area for assessment, evaluation, and research. In 2015, this document was reviewed, and an updated version was released (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

To help professionals obtain these competencies, several professional-development approaches have been formed. Zelna and Dunstan (2012) identified 11 assessment conferences that were offered across the United States. Since then, many conferences and institutes, for both academic and student-affairs professionals, have been offered by institutions, professional organizations, and accrediting agencies. To further development specifically for student-affairs professionals, NASPA now offers an annual assessment conference; ACPA offers an assessment institute; and ACUHO-I offers an online certificate in assessment.

Institutions have also used professional competencies to form campus-specific professional-development opportunities which serve as one component when building a culture of assessment. This culture includes institutional conditions that support perspectives that value assessment and provide the resources and tools to carry out this work (Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009; Culp & Dugny, 2012). Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, and Whitt (2011) describe this culture as

having “an ethic of positive restlessness” (p. 14), where institutions practice critical reflection, ongoing efforts to improve, and a constant desire to be better.

Although many efforts have been made to increase the competency levels and the engagement of student-affairs professionals around assessment, evidence exists that this assessment is not at an acceptable level to meet today’s higher-education needs. Kuk and Hughes (2002-2003), in their review of literature regarding graduate preparation for student-affairs professionals, point to a clear gap between “what new professionals know and what they can do” (p. 1). Studies conducted by Waple (2006), Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008), and Hoffman (2010), each with new student-affairs professionals, point to the same conclusion. New professionals’ ability to integrate assessment with everyday practice has not been demonstrated, and in some cases, their interest is lacking. Some professionals view assessment as less important than other responsibilities (Hoffman, 2010). It may be the case that new professionals, while being introduced to and trained in assessment during their graduate programs, see it as a separate part of their work, rather than something to be integrated with all other responsibilities. Graduate-school faculty and senior student-affairs officers (SSAOs) also recognize a gap in new professionals’ abilities to engage in assessment as part of practice. While faculty and SSAOs agree that assessment-related competencies are desirable, there is a “larger than typical” gap between this desire and the reality of what new professionals can demonstrate in their work (Dickerson et al., 2011).

### **Significance of the Study**

Previous studies regarding student-affairs assessment practice have focused on the competency levels of individual practitioners, mostly new professionals. These studies indicate that something seems to be missing from the equation. While still important, focusing on



developing skills and knowledge for assessment does not seem to be enough. The study described in this proposal is meant to explore disposition as the possible third component, along with skills and knowledge, that could help student affairs and student-affairs professionals most effectively incorporate assessment into practice.

Love and Estanek (2004) propose that, for student-affairs assessment to be most effective and sustained, individual professionals must develop an assessment mindset. To have an assessment mindset means that student-affairs professionals utilize assessment to shape their view of the world and to view their individual practice from this perspective as well. Other literature about student-affairs assessment includes the implication that the key to successfully integrating assessment into practice must include a certain disposition that supports this work (ACPA & NASPA, 2015).

Building a culture of assessment requires changing how professional organizations, graduate-preparation programs, divisions of student affairs, and individuals carry out their work. At the center of this transformation is a student-affairs workforce that is competent and invested in student-affairs assessment. However, the literature demonstrates a plethora of barriers that challenge this transformation. Practically speaking, in some cases, assessment has been added to positions that are already filled with responsibilities (Piper, 2007), making a lack of time a critical barrier for assessment practice (Blimling, 2013; M. J. Bresciani, 2010; Payne & Miller, 2009; Roberts, 2012). Practical deficits also exist, a lack of skill, knowledge, and expertise with assessment (M. J. Bresciani, 2010; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Payne & Miller, 2009; Roberts, 2012; Slager & Oaks, 2013), as well as a lack of institutional support and resources to conduct assessment work (M. J. Bresciani, 2010; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Payne & Miller, 2009; Slager & Oaks, 2013). In the context of organizational culture, assessment practice is inhibited by a lack

of commitment or even resistance (Blimling, 2013; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Roberts, 2012; Slager & Oaks, 2013) that sometimes stems from a belief that assessment is nothing more than a passing fad (Roberts, 2012). Motivation for assessment practice is also hindered by a fear that the results will reflect poorly on individuals or organizations (M. J. Bresciani, 2010; Piper, 2007; Slager & Oaks, 2013); a lack of trust in the results or faith that assessment can actually measure student learning (Payne & Miller, 2009; Roberts, 2012); and, in some cases, a lack of reward for assessment efforts (Culp & Dungy, 2012).

The barriers cited above are very legitimate and true based on professional observation and practice. M. J. Bresciani (2009-2010) is one scholar who has conducted empirical research on this topic, uncovering barriers that are unique to those expressed more anecdotally in other resources. M. J. Bresciani explored reasons why student-affairs professionals at 13 institutions were not engaging in learning-outcomes assessment despite a high level of commitment from the senior student affairs officer (SSAO). Data were collected through interviews with personnel in senior, mid-level, and entry-level positions, including members of assessment committees. Observations during a day-long workshop where professionals were directly engaged in assessment work and reviewing various documents, such as assessment plans, were also considered for the study. The most prevalent barrier uncovered was a lack of understanding about student learning and development theories and, therefore, a lack of ability to transfer the theory when developing educationally effective programs. Additionally, there was a lack of understanding about the difference between assessment and research as well as limited engagement with faculty partners when assessing student learning. Although this research was only one qualitative study and it focused on one particular area of student-affairs assessment, it

did, perhaps, uncover a much deeper concern that prevents student-affairs professionals from effectively engaging in the assessment of student learning.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Student affairs, as a profession, has expressed a high level of commitment to assessment for the purposes of improving programs and services, addressing external accountability expectations, and increasing the efficient use of diminishing resources. Steps have been taken to increase the student-affairs professionals' competency levels and to build cultures of assessment within departments and divisions of student affairs. However, a gap still exists between aspirations and the overall status of assessment in student-affairs practice (Dickerson et al., 2011; Kuk & Hughes, 2002-2003). New professionals are not prioritizing assessment as an integrated part of practice (Hoffman, 2010; Renn & Jessup-Anger, 2008; Waple, 2006). Senior student-affairs officers are dissatisfied with the level of assessment competency demonstrated by the new professionals (Dickerson et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk, Cobb, & Forrest, 2007), and expectations for demonstrated engagement in assessment have not become the norm for position descriptions and expectations (Burkard, Cole, Ott, & Stoflet, 2005; Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010). Despite a strong commitment and professional organizations' efforts to put assessment at the forefront, its practice in student affairs is not there yet.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study is to determine the defining qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition that would more effectively help student-affairs professionals integrate assessment into their practice. A second purpose is to explore the ways student-affairs professionals can develop this disposition.

## **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study will be achieved by answering the following research questions:

1. What are the defining qualities of student-affairs professionals who demonstrate an assessment disposition?
2. How can student-affairs professionals develop an assessment disposition?

The Delphi research method is well suited for exploring topics that are new and where limited knowledge about the topic currently exists (Skulmoski, Hartman, & Krahn, 2007). A panel of experts with experience coordinating student-affairs assessment and working with student-affairs professionals in practitioner roles will serve as participants for this study. Information from the following review of literature will guide the development of individual interview questions and, subsequently, a survey on the topic. The Delphi research process will include iterations for participants to anonymously complete a survey, followed by synthesized feedback compiled by the researcher and sent back to the participants in aggregate form. The goal will be to find consensus among the participants regarding the research questions.

## **Implications of the Study**

Findings from this study will contribute to the limited research on student-affairs assessment practice and will add an element of consideration, along with skills and knowledge development, regarding how the capacity for assessment practice can be improved for student-affairs professionals. The findings will also assist graduate-preparation programs, professional organizations, and divisions of student affairs to enhance their educational and professional development opportunities to better prepare student-affairs professionals to integrate assessment into their work.

## Definitions of Terms

Prior to furthering this discussion, it is important to define the significant terminology utilized to explore and study this problem. These terms include student affairs, student-affairs professionals, assessment, and disposition.

- **Student Affairs**--Student affairs is the collection of units within higher-education institutions that are focused on student services as well as student learning and development, often delineated specifically within one of the institution's divisions. Historic synonyms for student affairs include *student personnel* and *student services*.
- **Student-Affairs Professional**--A student-affairs professional is an individual who is trained to carry out student-affairs functions and programs. The student-affairs professionals referred to specifically in this study are those who serve in practitioner roles, actively engaged in the delivery of student-affairs programs and services.
- **Assessment**--The definition of assessment has also evolved due to the historical changes in its purpose and practice. For this study, assessment is defined as the “gathering [of] information about a particular program or group of programs in order to improve that program or programs all the while contributing to student development and learning” (M. J. Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004, pp. 8-9).
- **Disposition**--Briefly stated, disposition is the attitudes, beliefs, and values that precipitate habits of behavior or action. Synonyms for disposition include the term *mindset* (“Disposition”, n.d.; Dweck, 2006; Love & Estanek, 2004).

## Chapter Summary

As the student-affairs profession seeks to address the critical need of incorporating effective assessment practice into its daily work, thereby delivering services and programs that

ultimately support student learning, it is important to continue exploring the ways to best reach this goal. This study is designed to contribute to the conversation regarding how student-affairs professionals can improve their assessment practice by developing an assessment disposition, thus enhancing any skills or knowledge that they possess or attain. The Delphi method used for this study will provide a platform to begin a discussion about the student-affairs assessment disposition, a topic that has yet to be explored.

## CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Higher education in the United States has existed for nearly 400 years. While it was founded on European ideas (Cohen & Kisker, 2010), the transformation of higher education is truly a reflection of American history and culture. Higher education has become embedded into the economic and social aspects of modern society in the United States. Although this embeddedness has come with many opportunities, higher education has entered a “culture of compliance” (Kuh et al., 2015, p. 15) where external forces of accountability have roused the assessment movement that is in motion today.

The student-affairs profession has a role to play in institutional assessment. It is embedded in the philosophical foundations of student affairs, and today assessment is considered as means of survival (D. Bresciani, 2012; Schuh & Upcraft, 1998). The profession has placed an emphasis on assessment, and many initiatives have been implemented to help student-affairs professionals increase their competency and practice of assessment. While progress has been made, evidence indicates that there is more to explore in this area.

This Literature Review is divided into three sections. The first section provides a historical context that includes a review about how higher education and student affairs got to now as well as chronicling the assessment movement in higher education and student affairs, including how the assessment of student learning in academic and student affairs has begun to converge due to changing accreditation expectations and calls for increased collaboration. The second section provides a review of literature regarding how well student-affairs professionals have been able to prioritize assessment and incorporate it into practice. The focus of this section is on the development of competency models to define and to increase assessment skills and knowledge; how assessment has been prioritized in position descriptions and job expectations;

and how student-affairs professionals, especially new professionals, can incorporate assessment into practice. The final section of this chapter introduces the concept of disposition by reviewing how student-affairs assessment disposition has been described explicitly and implicitly in the current literature about student-affairs assessment practice. Disposition is further explored by describing models of its use in business and K-12 education. Research about the concept of mindset from the field of psychology concludes this section.

### **How Higher Education “Got to Now”**

In the book, *How We Got to Now: Six Innovations that Made the Modern World*, Johnson (2014) traces various phenomena of everyday modern life to historical people, events, and inventions that contributed to their current existence. Understanding how these things came to be helps create a better understanding for their meaning in the modern world. Similarly, the history of American higher education provides context for understanding the status of challenge and accountability that is a reality today. This history spans nearly 400 years and is reflective of the overall chronology of the United States. While this history is lengthy and complex, the purpose of the summary that follows is to provide a basis for understanding why higher education is currently facing a level of scrutiny and accountability not previously felt. As an ever-changing phenomenon, this summary attempts to answer the question of how higher education “got to now.” Student affairs is the major focus of this research study, so the historical progression of student-affairs work and its development as a distinct profession are given specific attention. Various scholars have segmented the history of higher education and student affairs into specific units (Cohen & Kisker, 2010; Dungy & Gordon, 2011; Thelin & Gassman, 2011). For this review, the history is segmented into four eras: Colonial Era, Americanization Era, Growth Era, and Accountability Era.



### **Colonial Era (1636 to 1786)**

The colonial era of higher education began in 1636 with the founding of Harvard College in the Massachusetts Bay Colony (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Eight other colonial colleges followed during the next 130 years. These colleges were mostly religious-based and were financed with private donations and individual student tuition, something most colonial families could not afford (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). These early institutions often served as finishing schools for young men, with stringent codes of behavior and faculty serving roles both inside and outside the classroom (Bok, 2006). With the goals of intellectual training and moral development, the curriculum focused on classical subjects such as math, logic, English, classical literature, Greek, and Latin (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Graduates primarily moved on to careers in the ministry or public service. Although fewer than 5,000 students graduated during these first 150 years, many of the graduates served as founders for the new nation, including 25 who signed the Declaration of Independence (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

### **Americanization Era (1787 to 1945)**

The second era represents the Americanization of higher education. The United States expanded west, and the population grew exponentially. The number of colleges and universities also grew, and the variation with the types of institutions and students attending them grew as well. Community- and state-supported institutions were added to the mix of already established private institutions. Shortly before the Civil War ended in 1865, the Industrial Revolution began, and the Morrill Act of 1862 provided each state with land that could be used to fund at least one state college so long as the institution included curriculum in the agricultural and mechanical arts (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). These land-grant colleges, as they have come to be known, shifted college education by broadening its purpose to include science and research. The public support

for higher education and the expansion of subjects with wider appeal increased the number of students interested in and able to obtain a college degree. By the end of this era, the “collegiate way” (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 130), defined as a four-year residential experience, became the most valued and standard college experience. This new reality provided the catalyst to develop a new profession in higher education, student personnel, which was later referred to as the student-affairs profession.

**The beginnings of student affairs.** The new collegiate model for higher education increased the students’ needs beyond the classroom and expanded the institutions’ research mission, causing strain on faculty time and resources (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Thus, institutions began hiring staff to perform non-teaching functions, such as student registration, discipline, and student housing. These first student-personnel workers were often titled deans of men and, later, deans of women (Dungy & Gordon, 2011).

The role of student-personnel workers was grounded in the desire for institutions of higher education to not only produce a knowledgeable and skilled workforce, but also to develop well-rounded citizens (American Council on Education, 1937; Dungy & Gordon, 2011). As student activities expanded, student-personnel workers found themselves serving dual roles that included administrative activities as well as focusing on the students’ overall development. Soon, student-personnel workers began to organize, and, in 1937, *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937) was written. This document emphasized educating the “whole” student. In other words, higher education should not only foster intellectual growth, but also address the students’ emotional, physical, social, and moral development.

*The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937) not only laid the philosophical groundwork for this new profession, but it also provided a framework for the field's structural components. The document included the identification of functional roles for student-personnel workers, such as admissions, orientation, career and personal counseling, health services, dining and housing, student activities, financial aid, and student discipline. Additionally, the authors emphasized the important role of student-personnel workers to coordinate their efforts with others, both inside and outside the institution. Finally, the need for intentional and prescribed research was emphasized to not only strengthen the profession, but also to expand knowledge about college students and their needs. This research emphasis led to the creation of student-development theories that are used today and continue to be explored (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). After 1937, the student-personnel profession continued to grow and develop. *The Student Personnel Point of View* was revised and updated in 1949 (American Council on Education Studies) to reflect the profession's accelerated development in little more than a decade.

### **Growth Era (1945 to 1975)**

The World War II victory in 1945 led to the United States becoming "the most powerful nation on earth" (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 187). The American population continued to steadily grow, but the enrollment in higher education grew at an even greater rate. The Serviceman's Readjustment Act, also known as the GI Bill, was enacted as a strategy to avoid an oversaturation of returning Veterans entering the job market at one time. The federal government underestimated the number of GIs who would accept this offer as well as the broad and changing impact that this bill would have on higher education for years to come (Thelin & Gasman, 2011). With more students enrolling in higher education, existing institutions expanded

into branches; new institutions were established; and the number of two-year institutions grew. Comprehensive universities, those offering a wide array of study areas, grew from many schools that were previously more specifically focused, such as normal schools and liberal arts colleges.

National events of the mid-1950s through the 1970s substantially affected who attended colleges and universities as well as how these institutions carried out their missions (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The illegalization of racial segregation at primary and secondary schools resulting from the 1954 Supreme Court decision in *Brown v. Board of Education Topeka* was later extended to higher education in 1956 with another Supreme Court decision in *Florida ex rel. Hawkins v. Board of Control*. The Civil Rights Act of 1964, protecting citizens' right to vote, use public facilities, and obtain a job, regardless of race, also provided funding for higher education to support staff training about how to address issues resulting from desegregation. Increasing access to higher education became a goal for the federal government as well as institutions. Changing policies and programs as well as shifting financial resources to encourage a greater diversity of students to attend college became a major focus (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

The Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 was enacted as part of President Lyndon Johnson's initiatives towards the creation of a Great Society (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005). This bill created federal financial aid to support students who could otherwise not afford to go to college. The breadth of this bill extended beyond financial aid by also supporting institutions to construct new facilities and providing financial support to address various social issues (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Funding was also made available through the creation of the Educational Opportunity Grant and TRIO programs to support students who needed assistance when pursuing a college education (TG Research and Analytical Services, 2005).

Along with federal financial support for students and institutions, the HEA specified that each state create a coordinating agency for higher education, which led to a “powerful and long-lasting influence” (Cohen & Kisker, 2010, p. 254) on higher education. Initially, each institution could maintain autonomy with the benefit of stream-lined advocacy for higher education from the institution to state legislators. With time, however, these benefits waned and were replaced by more control and accountability from these state commissions or boards (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

The ways students responded to local and national issues, such as the Civil Rights Movement and the Vietnam War, also began to dramatically change as complacency was replaced with activism (Thelin & Gasman, 2011). Students were dissatisfied with the overcrowded classrooms and residence halls. At the same time, students’ concerns about national issues prompted a level of student activism that had never existed on college campuses. This activism and the significant tragedies that resulted from it, such as student killings at Jackson State University in Mississippi and at Kent State University in Ohio, changed the public’s confidence in higher education (Thelin & Gasman, 2011).

The experiences of this era also changed how institutions addressed student issues. The *Joint Statement on Rights and Freedom of Students* provided a professional commitment to students and guidance to institutions, including student-affairs professionals, regarding students’ rights (American Association of University Professors, United States National Student Association, Association of Student Personnel Administrators, & National Association of Women Deans and Counselors, 1967). This approach supported students’ ability to learn in an environment where freedom of inquiry, freedom of expression, and freedom of assembly were central priorities. Arguably, this new focus on students’ rights signified a shift towards a

student-centered educational philosophy and a move further away from the teacher-centered approach of higher education's earlier days. During this era, the cost of higher education increased while private investments for higher education began to decrease. Much of the increased cost was attributed to expenses associated with attracting a more diverse population of students, increased faculty salaries and utility costs, and new expenses associated with addressing the social issues that emerged with a greater and more diverse student population, such as costs for security and personnel costs to ensure due process and equal opportunity.

**Student affairs during the Growth Era.** The expansion of higher-education institutions, both in terms of size and student population, instigated a greater need for management and service functions at each institution (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). In 1966, the National Association of Financial Aid Officers was established as these new professionals took on institutional roles that were previously held by presidents and faculty. Additionally, institutions began to reorganize into functional divisions of academic affairs, business affairs, and student affairs. Academic affairs included the academic schools or colleges, the library, the registrar, and financial aid. Business affairs typically included the institution's financial operations; personnel; facilities and grounds; security; and other business functions, such as purchasing, mail, and administrative computing. Typical functions for student affairs included student housing and dining, counseling, career placement, student organizations, and student health (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

During this period, student-affairs professionals' responsibilities changed significantly. The relationship between the institution and students greatly influenced how student-affairs professionals approached their work with students. Prior to the 1960s, institutions held an *in loco parentis* relationship with their students. In other words, the relationship between the

institution and the student was like that of a parent and child. This parental role, often filled by deans of men and deans of women, allowed institutions to dictate student behavior even if it infringed on constitutional rights such as freedom of speech, freedom of assembly, and freedom of religion (Lee, 2011). In 1961, the Fifth Circuit Court, in *Dixon v. Alabama*, determined that institutions must provide due process for student-conduct cases, and later court cases challenged institutions' ability to regulate student speech.

These changes in how institutions work with students, along with the challenges presented by a larger and more diverse student population, catapulted the field of student personnel into a professional realm, requiring a deeper understanding of students, student development, education, and management. Thus, in 1979, the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education established guidelines and standards for graduate-preparation programs in student affairs (Dungy & Gordon, 2011).

### **The Accountability Era (1975 to Present)**

The era of higher education between the late 1970s and the start of the new millennium was steady, especially when compared to the tumultuous experiences of the 1960s and early 1970s (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The American economy began to challenge the American way of life as the disparity between the very poor and the very rich grew larger. At the same time, the United States' debt increased, much because of the Cold War and significant tax cuts during the Reagan and Bush administrations. Although college enrollment leveled off between the mid-1960s and the 1980s, enrollment began to increase again in the 1990s when having a college degree began to be identified as a key to getting a good-paying job. Increased college enrollment in the 1990s was also attributed to the growth in graduate and professional education as well as more students attending lesser-expensive community colleges for two years before transferring

to four-year, public institutions. By the end of this era, higher education had become more embedded in the American social and economic systems. It had also become the most diverse and complex that it had ever been (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

At the same time, accountability crept in as a major burden on higher education (Bok, 2006; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). This external pressure first came from states and accrediting bodies with expectations that institutions more effectively demonstrate the impact on student outcomes. State legislators and higher-education boards were testing their boundaries of control over institutions, sometimes to the point where courts would decide the control boundaries. At the federal level, the government introduced the concept of compliance, mostly attached to federal financial aid. While accreditation was still considered voluntary, it was so connected with the professional licenses that states issued to individuals graduating from accredited programs, and with ties to the federal financial-aid program, that the idea of voluntary accreditation was very much a moot point (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

Financial strain on higher education began to emerge in ways not previously felt. Although public investment in higher education had increased, the high inflation rate during the late 1970s and early 1980s left institutions with less financial support than the dollars indicated. Tuition increased by more than 30%, however, the impact on institutions' resources was also minimal. Students felt the financial strain not only from increasing tuition rates, but also due to a major shift in student aid from grants to student loans (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

While criticism of higher education existed throughout history (Bok, 2006; Cohen & Kisker, 2010), the criticism that emerged at the end of this current era has begun to challenge higher education's leaders in very new ways. The expanse and complexity of higher education, along with its embedment in the American social and economic systems, calls for new



approaches in management and leadership. Unfortunately, the higher-education leaders who built the system in the Growth Era did not have the skills needed to face a future with less growth, limited resources, and an exploding technology age. Although the warning signs pointed towards the need to reform higher education, little change has occurred (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

The first 370 years of higher education in the United States were described as “one of our greatest success stories” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. vi). This statement was based on the progression of higher education to enroll expansive numbers of students, to advance knowledge and discovery through research, and to transform teaching and learning to meet the students’ changing and diverse needs. However, Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings’ commission (U.S. Department of Education, 2006) concluded that past achievements had led to complacency and a lack of attention on the future of higher education; therefore, the United States’ higher education needed to improve dramatically. This bold and alarming statement was supported by other writings that purported that higher education needed significant reform (Arum & Roska, 2011; Bok, 2006; Brandon, 2010). Issues with higher education took on various forms, depending upon the stakeholders. Legislators and other financial supporters of higher education began to question the return on investment for higher education (Arum & Roska, 2011). The ever-changing economy and job market spurred businesses (Arum & Roska, 2011) and the federal government (Lumina Foundation for Education, 2010; U.S. Department of Education, 2006) to express concern about the ability of higher education to provide an American workforce that is prepared for the technological and knowledge-based job market that, in turn, could maintain the United States’ economic and educational competitiveness in the world.

It is the overall quality of higher education that has garnered the most criticism from all stakeholders. This criticism includes a general concern about the quality of student learning (Bok, 2006). Others point to a lack of a clear purpose for higher education, where student learning has been replaced with too many personal and recreational student services (Arum & Roska, 2011) and learning has become a by-product of the college experience (Brandon, 2010). Curriculum that has been watered down with electives and a greater focus on job training has also moved higher education away from its purpose to provide a holistic education (Bok, 2006). Faculty members who are more focused on activities other than teaching is a concern for many stakeholders, including some faculty members themselves (Arum & Roska, 2011; Bok, 2006).

**Student affairs in the Accountability Era.** In the 1970s, the student-affairs profession continued to develop and expand as national organizations such as ACPA and NASPA provided leadership for this growing and changing profession (“History of ACPA,” n.d.; “The History of NASPA,” n.d.). Research on students and student development transformed into theoretical foundations for the profession, and graduate-preparation programs for student-affairs personnel began to be offered at schools across the country (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). During this era, the diversity of students, both domestic and international, expanded, spurring several studies about identity development for student populations that had not been enrolled higher education when student-development research first began (Renn & Reason, 2013). Distance education also allowed some students to enroll at multiple campuses and, for some, to not physically be on campus, thus creating challenges for student affairs to find new ways of delivering services and programs that were typically done face to face (Renn & Reason, 2013).

Student affairs also entered a renewed commitment to student learning, as depicted in numerous foundational documents on the topic: *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications*

*for Student Affairs* (ACPA, 1996), “Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs” (Blimling & Whitt, 1998), *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), American College Personnel Association (ACPA), & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA), 1998), and *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (NASPA & ACPA, 2004). These writings collectively identify student-affairs professionals as educators and call for a collaborative approach, especially between student-affairs professionals and faculty, to educate the whole student. Establishing student-learning outcomes and assessing them are hallmark features of *Learning Reconsidered* (Dungy & Gordon, 2011).

Although the student-affairs profession was borne from a specific need within a growing and evolving higher-education system, the question of whether student affairs is a true profession has existed since its beginnings, often setting student affairs apart from its academic-affairs counterparts. This question stems from the content and level of education needed to be a student-affairs practitioner as well as whether student affairs can truly claim part ownership for the role of educating students, a role typically held by faculty. On some campuses, this issue plays out more predominantly than others, affecting the political nature of the campus culture as well as funding (Reason & Broido, 2011).

## **Summary**

The purpose of including this review about the histories of higher education and student affairs was to collectively examine how changes during the past 400 years led to the atmosphere of accountability and the subsequent assessment movement that exist today. The country’s historical events had much impact in the shaping of higher education. Initially, the need for college-educated people was limited to the small number of individuals who would become

societal leaders. As the country grew in population, and moved through the industrial age and into the technology age, higher education became a means to create a workforce that was prepared to contribute to the United States' place in a global economy. Additionally, for many citizens, getting a college education moved from being an individual dream to being a financial necessity. Access to higher education became a national priority. Essentially, higher education was woven into the fabric of the American society, and with this status, came expectations of productivity in terms of student outcomes. The resources that previously flowed into higher education decreased substantially, but a new level of accountability emerged. Thus, institutions of higher education needed to find ways to do more with less and to focus investments on programs that truly meet the educational goals. Assessment became the means for institutions to demonstrate productivity and to make the necessary refinements to be more productive while utilizing fewer resources.

### **The Assessment Story**

Assessment in American higher education has existed in some form since higher education's beginning. The same is true for the student-affairs profession. Within the past 30 years, assessment has become a central, and sometimes debated, issue in higher education and student affairs, enough so that it has been described as a *movement* (Kuh et al., 2015; Sandeen & Barr, 2006). This section tells the assessment story. Starting with the Pre-Assessment Movement Era where assessing student learning was important, but during a time of significant growth in higher education, assessment of institutional effectiveness was minimally considered. The Assessment Movement, beginning in the 1980s, describes how assessment has evolved and has become a critical component of higher education's existence and success. Assessing student learning has also become the ultimate measure of success. Finally, this section ends with a

perspective about assessment as it currently exists in higher education, including the challenges of incorporating assessment into daily practice and the opportunities for collaboration between academic affairs and student affairs.

### **Pre-Assessment Movement Era**

Although the national conversation about assessment is fairly recent, assessment existed in various forms since the beginning of higher education in the United States. The assessment of student learning, especially, has always been an important priority for faculty (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). The seminal works about the student-affairs profession also express a high need to assess student learning as well as to conduct research that leads to the continual improvement of student-affairs work (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education Studies, 1949).

**Assessment of academic student learning.** The colonial years of American higher education relied on the faculty transferring knowledge to students, mostly via lectures and lab demonstrations, and textbooks were limited to the few volumes in existence which each school could acquire for its small library (Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Assessment of student learning, then, was mostly limited to student recitations and debates, followed by written commentary from the faculty evaluating how well students had learned the material (M. J. Bresciani et al., 2009; Cohen & Kisker, 2010). Faculty members, initially called tutors, lived on campus and could also monitor the moral formation of students (Cohen & Kisker, 2010).

The increased student enrollment in the early 1900s necessitated a more efficient way of assessing each student's level of learning. Per Cohen and Kisker (2010), grade marks, in the form of letter grades from A to F or numerical grades that were on 4-point, 10-point, and 100-point scales, emerged as a means of summarizing student progress. Standardized tests, typically

conducted by external agencies, were also introduced. Both new assessment methods came with a certain level of dissatisfaction from the faculty. However, until the more recent assessment movement, these methods remained the primary approach to evaluate the level of learning and the readiness for student progression in higher education.

Research of student learning and development began near the mid-20th Century with the advancement of educational and developmental psychology (M. J. Bresciani et al., 2009; Ewell, 2002). Developmental theories emerged, such as Chickering's theory describing seven vectors about the development of students through their college years, and Sanford's theory of challenge and support. The impact of the college experience on students and society also began to be examined, with major writings such as Feldman and Newcomb's *The Impact of College on Students*, Astin's *Four Critical Years*, Bowen's *Investment in Learning*, and Pace's *Measuring the Outcomes of College*. In 1975, Tinto began to study student retention, followed by a progression of further studies that used applied research to improve the ability for institutions to positively impact the college experience. Other movements during the 1970s, which later played a role in the assessment movement, included the rise of more program evaluation and scientific management to improve the administration of higher education, as well as a focus on mastery learning, which can be linked to the outcome-based learning of today (Ewell, 2002).

**Assessment of institutional performance.** The extraordinary degree of accountability experienced today did not exist in the earlier years of higher education. Middaugh (2010) described the years after World War II and through the mid-1980's as the "charmed existence" (p. 1) of higher education. Enrollment in higher education soared, first with the returning World War II Veterans and later with their children, the baby boomers, entering college in the 1960s and 1970s. There was much government support for higher education, and the number of degree

options increased significantly. If degrees were being conferred to meet the workforce demands, there was little call for accountability in higher education. Therefore, assessment was far from the minds of most higher-education administrators.

**Student-affairs assessment foundations.** Assessment was embedded in the early history of student affairs when the philosophical foundations of the profession were first identified. The student-affairs profession traces its beginnings to the late 1800s when the first deans of men and, later, deans of women were appointed to responsibilities that addressed student needs beyond the classroom. In the early part of the 20th Century, these faculty-appointed positions were transitioned to the roles for non-faculty, student-personnel workers. These pioneers began to organize and lay the groundwork for the student-affairs profession. The American Council on Education's Committee on Problems and Plans in Education wrote *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937). Among the many charges embodied within the document was that research about both services and student outcomes should be conducted. Specifically, research regarding the student learning that takes place outside the classroom was identified as an essential component of this emerging profession. When the follow-up document, the 1949 version of *The Student Personnel Point of View* was written, program evaluation was introduced as an essential responsibility for all personnel workers (American Council on Education Studies, 1949). Additionally, personnel workers were encouraged to conduct satisfaction and utilization studies for continually improving programs and services. A thorough study of both documents leads to the conclusion that personnel workers, and the profession, as a whole, were challenged with numerous broad and diverse tasks, many of which have been fulfilled by today's student-affairs professionals (Gillon, Beatty, & Patton Davis, 2012).

It is important to note that both the 1937 and 1949 documents identified student-personnel workers as educators, a point of view that continues to be discussed and debated today. One could argue that the first student-outcome statements, some learning and others more developmental or experiential, were written in the 1949 *Student Personnel Point of View*. Table 1 below depicts the litany of attainments that students should expect to accomplish in college (American Council on Education Studies, 1949).

Table 1

*Conditions that Demonstrate Students' Personal Growth and Social Wisdom* (American Council on Education Studies, 1949)

Condition
The Student Achieves Orientation to His College Environment
The Student Succeeds in His Studies
He Finds Satisfactory Living Facilities
The Student Achieves a Sense of Belonging to the College
The Student Learns Balanced Use of His Physical Capacities
The Student Progressively Understands Himself
The Student Understands and Uses His Emotions
The Student Develops Lively and Significant Interests
The Student Achieves Understanding and Control of His Financial Resources
The Student Progresses Toward Appropriate Vocational Goals
The Student Develops Individuality and Responsibility
The Student Discovers Ethical and Spiritual Meaning in Life
The Student Learns to Live with Others
The Student Progresses Toward Satisfactory and Socially Acceptable Adjustments
The Student Prepares for Satisfying, Constructive Post-College Activity

### **The Assessment Movement**

It was in the early 1980s when the modern assessment movement began (Ewell, 2002; Kuh et al., 2015). Issues of decreasing enrollments, national economic challenges, and a new focus on student outcomes challenged higher education to deal with decreasing financial resources while expectations increased (Middaugh, 2010). Higher education was being forced to do more with less and to provide evidence of its overall effectiveness.



**The accountability-improvement debate.** In 1985, the first National Conference on Assessment in Higher Education was held in Columbia, South Carolina, and the decades-long conversation about assessment began. Ewell (2002) described three distinct challenges that permeated the discussion during this time. First, defining assessment, particularly the *purpose* of assessment, was influenced by multiple points of view. Some people saw assessment as a means to examine the individual student's learning, while others believed that assessment should focus on the overall education systems. A third point of view came from people who believed that assessment should focus on program evaluation and a means to improve higher education. Essentially, this debate narrowed down to the long-standing issue between assessment for accountability versus assessment for improvement, a discussion that continued throughout the assessment movement (Ewell, 2009). The second major challenge for the assessment movement was regarding the lack of instruments available for assessment. Some institutions could develop their own instruments while others relied on the emerging standard instruments that were available in the marketplace. While the standardized instruments did not necessarily match the needs of each institution perfectly, the pressures for external accountability moved schools to use these instruments despite the costs and limitations. Finally, the third major challenge was the ability to implement assessment into daily work at the institution (Ewell, 2002). Having few models from which to draw ideas, institutions were left to consider how to plan for resources as well as how to structure assessment work within the institution.

By the 1990s, it was more apparent to higher-education leaders that assessment was not a fad and would not be departing from the agenda (Ewell, 2002). Changing accreditation requirements began to replace the state-mandated assessment programs, and more institutions reported engaging in assessment of some form and level. As Ewell noted, assessment was

emerging more clearly as a “distinct and recognizable scholarship of practice” (p. 13). Efforts to institutionalize assessment included the formation of assessment committees, methods to track assessment activity, and formalizing assessment responsibilities into positions. At some institutions, assessment-coordinator positions were created, sometimes as an outward sign to the stakeholders that assessment was a campus priority. Additionally, assessment conferences and the *Assessment Update* journal, first published in 1989, were developed to support a growing need to share skills and knowledge about assessment (Ewell, 2002).

As with most emerging practices, the debates surrounding assessment continued and, in an essence, helped the movement advance. Debated issues included whether educational outcomes could actually be measured and whether attempts at measurement would only result in questioning the faculty members’ work and relying on their expertise to determine curriculum. During this time, other factors also played a role in shaping the assessment movement. While not long lived, assessment started to become associated with Total Quality Management (TQM), an approach which was borrowed from the business world that essentially diminished in the higher-education arena as a passing fad (Birnbaum, 2000; Ewell, 2002). TQM’s contribution to the assessment movement was the recognition that assessing the processes can be as important as assessing the outcomes. In 1990, the U.S. Department of Education became involved with the assessment movement by establishing national learning-outcome goals for higher education through the work of the National Education Goals Panel. Although this initiative was never carried out it may have foreshadowed the U.S. government’s accountability measures during recent times (Ewell, 2002).

By the end of the 1980s and 1990s, much development and debate regarding assessment had taken place, and the movement continued. Despite this activity, engagement by individual

faculty and departments was still lacking. In 1989, the North Central Association (NCA) issued an initiative calling for institutions to become more student centered. Additionally, accreditation criteria included a higher focus on assessing student learning and transforming institutional culture. In 1996, the NCA added more specific direction to these criteria. Despite these expectations, a six-year review of progress indicated that very few institutions could demonstrate that they were assessing student learning and using the results for improvement, although the awareness about effective student-learning assessment had increased (Lopez, 2002).

**Reframing student learning.** In the 1990s, the shift from a teaching focus to a learning focus also began to emerge (Barr & Tagg, 1995; Ewell, 2002). This shift was precipitated by decreasing resources for education as well as an increasing diversity of students. The teaching, or instructional, paradigm relies on input-resources, such as numbers of faculty and square footage for lab space, for success. This approach could not effectively keep up when resources began to diminish and the needs of a more diverse student population increased. In contrast, a learning-focused approach for education shifted the focus towards student learning where success is based on student outcomes. Thus, students who received a learning-focused education played a collaborative role in their learning, allowing the learning experiences to be as diverse as the students themselves. Institutions then had the responsibility to create environments where students could engage in learning experiences that helped them to construct their own knowledge and to develop the ability to use their resources to solve problems (Barr & Tagg, 1995). A successful learning-focused educational system relied on assessment to know whether the environments being created produced the expected student outcomes, and if necessary, to offer insight about where adjustments should be made. Thus, within a learning paradigm, the institutions became learning organizations (Barr & Tagg, 1995).

**A renewed commitment to assessment in student affairs.** While research and evaluation were part of developing the student-affairs profession, the idea of assessment had not been thoroughly revisited until Upcraft and Schuh (1996) published their book, *Assessment in Student Affairs*. Their reasons for reigniting the conversation about assessment in student affairs run parallel to the reasons for the assessment movement in higher education overall, including stakeholder dissatisfaction with educational outcomes and the rising cost of education leading to higher levels of accountability. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) also believed that it was necessary for student-affairs professionals to engage in assessment to demonstrate essentiality within the higher-education arena and survive in an environment with declining resources. Assessment could be used for improving quality, making good financial decisions, developing policy, making decisions, and navigating the political nature of higher education. Thirteen years later, Schuh (2009) recognized student-affairs professionals' need for more assessment tools. In his book, *Assessment Methods for Student Affairs*, Schuh again addressed the reasons that student-affairs professionals should engage in assessment practice. While citing strategic planning and quality improvement, the purpose of accountability was much more pronounced. Student learning, retention, political pressure, and accreditation were also linked to the accountability purpose for engaging in assessment.

**Student affairs' partnership in student learning.** While resurgence of the discussion regarding assessment in student affairs was taking place, the topic of student affairs' role in student learning was also underway. Key documents were written and discussed about this topic throughout the 1990s and early 2000s. These documents included the *Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (ACPA, 1996), "Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs" (Blimling & Whitt, 1998), *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for*

*Learning* (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998), and *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (NASPA & ACPA, 2004). The discourse surrounding these documents was not only centered on the role student affairs plays in student learning, but also a commitment to assessing student learning and, as some of the titles imply, a desire and need for student-affairs professionals to work in collaboration with others, especially faculty and academic-affairs professionals.

In 1996, *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (ACPA) was written to stimulate discourse regarding how student-affairs professionals can create opportunities and environments that contribute to students' learning and development. The authors described five conditions that contribute to a learning-oriented student-affairs division. These conditions included (a) a mission that complements the institution's mission with the primary goal of programs and services focused on student learning and development; (b) resources allocated for student learning and development; (c) professionals who collaborate with others to promote student learning and development; (d) student affairs staff members who are experts on students, the student environment, and teaching and learning processes; and (e) policies and programs that are based on promising practices from research about student learning and institution-specific assessment data.

The discourse surrounding *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1996) was followed by "Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs," a collaborative initiative by ACPA and NASPA (Blimling & Whitt, 1998). Blimling and Whitt identified seven good practices, three of which related directly to student-learning and outcome assessment. Good practice in student affairs included creating a system that "engages students in active learning" (p. 13), "uses systematic inquiry to improve student and institutional performance" (p. 13), and "forges

educational partnerships that advance student learning” (p. 13). Just as *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937; American Council on Education Studies, 1949) was meant to shape the daily work of student-affairs practitioners, so, too, was the stated purpose of these principles. Additionally, like the economic issues and political pressure driving the assessment agenda, the principles were written to address these same concerns by improving student-affairs practice.

A strong statement regarding the joint responsibility for student learning between student affairs and academic affairs is found in *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning*, written as a collaborative effort by AAHE, ACPA, and NASPA (1998). Personnel in academic affairs and student affairs both have expertise about students and student learning, presenting a powerful force that can shape higher education for the future. Included among the principles that support a strong, collaborative system for education is the assessment of student learning.

Acknowledging the importance of published works such as *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1996), “Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs” (Blimling & Whitt, 1998), and *Powerful Partnerships* (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998) to place a focus on student learning, the writers of *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (NASPA & ACPA, 2004) wanted to challenge conventional systems and approaches for teaching and learning in higher education by offering an alternative view. Specifically, the authors challenged the idea that student learning is a task left to academic affairs and that student development is the responsibility of student affairs. Rather, *Learning Reconsidered* made the case that learning was an integrated process that involved all aspects of the student experience; therefore, student development was not separate but, rather, part of student learning.

This point of view supports the shift in education from a teaching focus, where knowledge is transferred from the teacher to the student, to a learner-focused approach, where learning is a transformational experience that is mostly facilitated by the student's engagement in various learning opportunities (Barr & Tagg, 1995; NASPA & ACPA, 2004). *Learning Reconsidered* (NASPA & ACPA, 2004) suggests that, to implement the holistic definition of student learning, higher education must reconsider how academic-affairs and student-affairs personnel work together to create integrated learning experiences, focusing on shared sets of student outcomes and creating a partnership to assess student learning. Student-affairs professionals must embrace an identity that they are educators and that they must be prepared to effectively ensure that student experiences contribute to transformative learning.

**The evolving definition of assessment.** While higher-education practice regarding assessment has changed, the definition of assessment has transformed. Early definitions of assessment focused mostly on data collection. Banta (1988) defined assessment as the “collecting of evidence of (1) student performance on specified measures of development, (2) program strengths and weaknesses, and (3) institutional effectiveness” (as cited in Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 17). Later, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) used a similar definition of assessment: “any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness” (p. 18). Their broad definition could be used not only for assessing student-learning outcomes, but also for the assessment of satisfaction and cost-effectiveness. This early perspective about assessment is reflective of the culture for accountability in which the assessment movement was born. Assessment was meant more to tell a story about what was happening in higher education than to be used when making improvements.

Assessment as a concept may still include measuring various goals or outcomes (M. J. Bresciani et al., 2009; Suskie, 2009), however, recent definitions have focused much more on student learning or using assessment to improve student learning, depicting a philosophical change related to current practice (Barham & Dean, 2008; Kuh et al., 2015). The assessment cycle, or assessment “loop,” has become a more predominant perspective about what assessment is or should be. M. J. Bresciani (as cited in M. J. Bresciani et al., 2004) described assessment as an ongoing and continuous process of asking the following questions: (a) “What are we trying to do and why?” (p. 9), (b) “What is my program supposed to accomplish?” (p. 9), (c) “How well are we doing it?” (p. 9), (d) “How do we know?” (p. 9), (e) “How do we use the information to improve or celebrate successes?” (p.9), and (f) “Do the improvements we make work?” (p. 9). Suskie (2009) included program implementation, but also described assessment as an ongoing process of (a) “Establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning” (p. 4); (b) “Ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes” (p. 4); (c) “Systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations” (p.4); and (d) “Using resulting information to understand and improve student learning” (p. 4). Visual representations of the assessment loop, like the one in Figure 1, vary somewhat from one to the other, but often depict the cyclical nature of assessment and the important step of using the results to make improvements.





Figure 1. Visual representation of the assessment cycle or assessment loop.

The terminology related to assessment has also been a topic of discussion, sometimes complicating the understanding about what assessment is and is not (Barham & Dean, 2008). The terms *assessment* and *evaluation* are often used interchangeably, and differentiating between *assessment* and *research* is also a challenge. Essentially, assessment provides a means to understand how institutions are meeting goals (Sandeen & Barr, 2006), whether institutional efforts are making a difference (M. J. Bresciani, 2010), and how to make improvements (Love & Estanek, 2004). Assessment has moved from an act of collecting data to a much more complex process where data are used to evaluate and make decisions for improvement. This new approach includes gathering information, analyzing data, and using them to answer questions that lead to changes or improvements (Barham & Dean, 2008). Evaluation is associated with the act of applying judgment to collected data (Barham & Dean, 2008; Love & Estanek, 2004) and is often included as one step within the assessment process (Suskie, 2009). Finally, while the rigorous practice of assessment calls for utilizing similar methods and procedures that are encompassed in research, the purpose of each practice differs. The purpose of research is to test theories and to develop new knowledge that can be generalized and applied to other situations. Assessment could be considered a form of action research (Suskie, 2009). The purpose of

assessment is to understand the effectiveness of specific programs and services to reach specified outcomes (M. J. Bresciani, 2011).

### **Current Assessment Era**

The assessment movement demonstrates its importance in ensuring student learning and the improvement of higher education. Legitimizing assessment indicates that, unlike other initiatives that have faded from the higher-education landscape, assessment is here to stay (Ewell, 2009). While still debated as polar motivations, assessment that addresses accountability standards and assessment to improve student learning can effectively coexist. Although assessment in higher education can still include measuring needs, satisfaction, and usage (M. J. Bresciani et al., 2009), as well as overall institutional effectiveness (Middaugh, 2010), in truth, the accountability is *about* student learning. Therefore, most recent discourse about assessment in higher education focuses on student learning and improvements to higher education that will essentially improve student-learning outcomes.

**Assessment in practice.** The National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) was established in 2008, with the purpose of advancing the student-learning outcomes' agenda in the United States, including tracking the assessment movement's progress. To this end, a survey of provosts and chief academic officers was conducted in 2009 (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009) and again in 2013 (Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Additionally, in 2009-2010, the NILOA conducted four focus groups with academic deans, provosts, presidents, and directors of institutional research to gain a narrative perspective about the status of assessing student-learning outcomes. The key results from the 2009-2010 focus groups were that (a) assessment is starting to become more integrated into the institutional landscape of higher education; (b) accreditation is the most significant catalyst for the assessment movement; (c) it is

essential that faculty are involved in assessment, even if there exists a central assessment coordinator; and (d) the most successful assessment occurs when it is embedded within existing institutional structures and processes, rather than as an activity that is separate or external to existing structures such as policies, procedures, and positions (Kinzie, 2010).

Focus-group data unveiled a major barrier precipitating a lack of faculty involvement with assessment. The faculty members believed that assessment is a distraction from the real work of teaching and that student grades, not assessment tasks, should depict how well students are learning. Additionally, some faculty members viewed the overarching goals of retention and improved graduation rates as someone else's responsibility. These barriers indicated that, for more faculty members to become engaged with assessment, it needs to be meaningful.

Assessment that helps faculty members improve their ability to assess student work was found to be the most acceptable. In the end, administrators who participated in the focus groups cited the motivation to engage in assessment as one of the continuing challenges.

During the four-year period from the 2009 NILOA survey and focus groups to the 2013 survey, some incremental changes in the assessment movement occurred (Kuh et al., 2014). The major findings of the 2013 study indicated that the focus of assessment was clearly shifting towards student-learning outcomes and that faculty would be the key to moving this assessment forward. Although assessment was being used more often internally, the prime motivator to conduct assessment was still focused on expectations and accountability from external entities, especially accrediting agencies.

**Collaboration and shared responsibility.** Collaboration between student affairs and academic affairs to assess student learning has been an ongoing part of the assessment discussion since *The Student Learning Imperative* was written in 1996 (ACPA). Kuh and Banta (2000)

describe assessment as one of the areas where faculty and student-affairs professionals can contribute equally. Further, faculty and student-affairs professionals each bring unique perspectives about students and student learning that can enhance an institution's ability to substantiate, through effective curricular and co-curricular assessment, its cumulative impact on students (Banta & Kuh, 1998; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009). Ewell (2002) suggests that, for the assessment movement to become an integrated part of campus culture, the paradigm that assessment is an evaluative process must shift to a paradigm where a "collective responsibility for fostering student attainment" (p. 24) exists, thus changing the idea that assessment results are for the administrators and their decision making, and transforming higher education to a learning organization where assessment matters to everyone.

Higher-education accrediting agencies also recognized that curricular and co-curricular experiences are important to the overall student experience; the agencies expected institutions to demonstrate that students are truly obtaining the outcomes that the institutions claim will occur because of student participation in curricular and co-curricular activities. In 2013, five higher-education associations and seven regional accrediting commissions endorsed three principles required of higher-education institutions to demonstrate student achievement through assessment. These principles require institutions to (a) demonstrate how students are learning in both curricular and co-curricular activities, (b) rigorously evaluate student performance, and (c) demonstrate how the college experience prepares students for life beyond college. Essentially, institutions must demonstrate that they are using assessment results to improve student learning, and that measuring student learning is a shared responsibility across the institution (Higher Learning Commission, 2013). To these ends, assessment is truly a collaborative effort (Banta, 2002).

**Next steps.** While the accountability of higher education necessarily remains, the focus of assessment seems to be shifting towards what Kuh et al. (2015) call “the big question”: “How will colleges and universities in the United States both broaden access to higher learning and enhance student accomplishment *for all students* while at the same time containing and reducing costs?” (p. 2). The assessment movement has precipitated an increased focus on student-learning outcomes, the availability of assessment tools, and the overall support and practice of assessment (Kuh et. al, 2015). However, the results of these efforts do not show in the overall improvement of student learning. A gathering of 146 examples of institutions practicing what would be considered good assessment indicated that only 6% of these institutions could demonstrate improvements for student learning because of these assessment efforts (Banta & Blaich, 2011).

The Wabash National Study (Blaich & Wise, 2011) was a longitudinal research study that involved thousands of students and nearly 80 higher education institutions across the United States. Its overall goal was to increase the understanding about how the college experience impacts a wide range of student-learning outcomes. Researchers hoped that providing good assessment data to institutions would entice action that would result in an overall improvement for the institutions’ ability to improve student learning. However, early results indicated that 40% of the initial 19 participating institutions had not shared the data with the campus community. Additionally, less than 25% of the institutions had taken any action to make improvements based on the data they received. Blaich and Wise (2011) stated:

For the most part, faculty, staff, and students are curious about their institutions, but in the busy, multi-tasking environments in which we all work, general curiosity does not compete well against the classes we need to prepare, the papers we need to write or grade, and the programs we need to implement. The way we govern and structure our institutions means that the simple reporting of assessment data has little hope of generating the kind of “data-informed, continuous improvement” that many of us hope for. (p. 12)

Gathering data appears to be easier and more readily practiced than effectively using this information to make improvements (Blaich & Wise, 2011; Kuh et al., 2015).

Moving forward, then, the next steps in the assessment movement should be focused on using data that is now more readily being collected to improve student learning. This transformed point of view will require a different mindset about assessment than what currently exists. Banta and Blaich (2011) suggest several ways to “close the loop” (p. 23). First, faculty and staff need to be directly engaged in assessment as an integral part of their responsibility to help students learn. Therefore, assessment programs must be developed with this goal in mind. It is important to recognize that data-based improvement for student learning takes time and, sometimes, can be derailed by turnover of institutional leadership or assessment coordinators. When more faculty and staff are engaged in multi-year assessment plans, this derailment is less likely to occur. Second, institutions should foster a learning culture where faculty and staff have access to information and know how to use it. Fulcher, Good, Coleman, and Smith (2014) take this issue further and believe that faculty and staff will need better training, specifically on how to truly improve student learning. Sometimes, what is deemed as using the data to make improvements is focused on other things, such as improving data-collection methods or the instruments themselves. These actions, while perhaps necessary, do not necessarily lead to improved student learning. Finally, Banta and Blaich (2011) suggest that the attitude about assessment needs to fully transform towards the purpose of improving and ensuring student learning. They state:

Assessment efforts must be upgraded to ensure that they are far more likely than they are at present to lead to improvements in student learning. A key step in doing so is to emphasize that the most important outcome of assessment is not gathering high-quality data, generating reports, or stimulating conversation among colleagues. That outcome is instead demonstrably improving student learning by assessing it and using the findings to revise programs accordingly. (p. 27)

The assessment programs and plans should be designed with this purpose in mind, and the data gathered should be such that faculty and staff can truly take positive action.

### **Status of Student Affairs' Practice of Assessment**

In the past two decades, assessment has emerged as a core component of effective student-affairs practice. How well student-affairs professionals, especially those individuals with practitioner roles, can incorporate effective assessment into daily practice is at question. This section chronicles what has been accomplished within the student-affairs profession to move the assessment agenda forward and how well these efforts are paying off thus far. Professional organizations and institutions are making efforts to build an infrastructure to support assessment by creating frameworks around the skills and knowledge necessary to carry out this work, defining assessment-related terminology, and providing professional-development opportunities. Although the few studies regarding how well assessment is making its way into the core of student-affairs practice have run parallel in time to some of these initiatives, the research indicates that this movement is slow and lagging and indicates that something is missing.

### **Competency Models**

Among the major barriers for the student-affairs profession to move forward with transformation to become an assessment culture are the lack of competency and confidence expressed by student-affairs personnel to do this work (Culp & Dungy, 2012; Payne & Miller, 2009; Roberts, 2012; Slager & Oaks, 2013). Professional competencies serve as a theoretical foundation to guide the profession and to shape position requirements, professional preparation, development, and practice. Student-affairs organizations have created competency models to describe the skills and knowledge necessary for professionals to effectively carry out their work, including incorporating assessment into their daily practice.

The ASK Standards (ACPA, 2006) were created in response to the accelerated movement of the profession towards student-learning outcomes and the external pressure for higher levels of accountability in higher education. The document was created to establish a common set of standards for the skills, knowledge, and disposition necessary for all student-affairs professionals to engage in effective assessment. The 14 content areas are as follows: assessment design, articulating learning and development outcomes, selection of data-collection and management methods, assessment instruments, surveys used for assessment purposes, interviews and focus groups used for assessment purposes, assessment methods, analysis, benchmarking, program review and evaluation, assessment ethics, effective reporting and use of results, politics of assessment; and assessment education. Each content area includes 2-9 statements describing the abilities that student-affairs professionals should possess to meet the content standard. The ASK Standards have been endorsed by accrediting bodies, such as the North Central Association and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges, as well as by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (Henning, Mitchell, & Maki, 2008).

To advance the usefulness of the ASK Standards, *Assessment in Practice: A Companion Guide to the ASK Standards* was published by ACPA (2008). The purpose of this 90-page document is to provide a concise, yet comprehensive, guide that can be used to increase the assessment abilities of professionals who want to further their understanding and knowledge about assessment and assessment practice. The document includes further theoretical information as well as case-study examples that model the specific assessment practice described in each chapter. Perhaps the most important contributions that this document makes are the introductory pages that include constructs and definitions for terms commonly used in assessment, but not necessarily agreed upon from one author to another (Barham & Dean, 2008).



One of the barriers with moving assessment practice forward is a lack of clarity and understanding about what assessment is as well as the how to understand the various components that compose assessment work. The description of each term, or construct, is based on works by various assessment scholars, with an attempt at identifying definitions that are encompassing and could be universally utilized. The terms and constructs described include assessment, evaluation, research, mission, goal, objective, outcome, assessment plan, assessment cycle, program review, program evaluation, and self-study. Special effort is made to differentiate assessment, evaluation, and research because these constructs have evolved and, while related, have different meanings. Additionally, a glossary is presented at the end of the document; the glossary includes definitions for the terms used throughout the guide that could be used in everyday practice to create shared meaning among scholars and practitioners.

ACPA and NASPA, the two largest and most-encompassing student-affairs organizations, initially developed *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Practitioners* in 2010 and recently produced an updated version in 2015. Other national and international organizations that often fall under divisions of student affairs have developed their own sets of competencies. Among these organizations are the Association of College and University Housing Officers-International's (ACUHO-I, 2012) *Core Competencies: The Body of Knowledge for Campus Housing Professionals*, the Association of College Unions International's (ACUI), 2008 *Core Competencies for the College Union and Student Activities Profession*, the National Association for College Admission Counseling's (NACAC, 2000) *Statement on Counselor Competencies*, and the National Association of College Stores' (NACS, 2006) *NACS College Store Competency Model*. Each of these documents includes competency expectations, in some form, related to assessment, evaluation, and research.

The *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) has 10 major categories: personal and ethical foundations; values, philosophy, and history; assessment, evaluation, and research; law, policy, and governance; organizational and human resources; leadership; social justice and inclusion; student learning and development; technology; and advising and supporting. Each competency area is divided into three levels (foundational, intermediate, and advanced), with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions that student-affairs professionals are expected to have regardless of their functional area or specialization within student affairs. Individuals could be at varying levels of competency in each category at any given time in their career. For the category of *assessment, evaluation, and research*, all student-affairs professionals, at a minimum, must be able to differentiate assessment, program review, evaluation, planning, and research; to select appropriate methods, methodologies, designs, and tools; to facilitate data collection; to articulate, interpret, and apply reports and studies; to assess the legitimacy, trustworthiness, and validity of various studies; to consider the strengths and limitations of various methodologies; to explain how policies and procedures, such as Institutional Review Board (IRB) approval and informed consent, are necessary for ethical practice; to ensure that communication about the results is accurate, responsible, and effective; to understand the political and educational sensitivity of handling and disseminating data; to design program and learning outcome goals that are clear, specific, and measurable; and to explain to others the relationship between assessment processes and learning.

Professional competencies are not mutually exclusive, and competency in one area may even be essential to building competency in another area. For example, one set of sequential competencies identified by Keeling, Wall, Underhile, and Dungy (2008) includes incorporating competency in student learning with competency in assessment. Four essential, sequential

competencies are as follows: (a) mapping learning, (b) integrating learning, (c) supporting students as learners, and (d) assessing the outcomes of learning. Mapping learning includes understanding how learning occurs as well as recognizing the places and integrated experiences that lead to student-learning outcomes. To integrate learning, student-affairs professionals must be able to intentionally shape an environment where student learning occurs within a web of experiences that build upon and support one another and where students can reflect on these experiences enough to make profound connections. For example, students often become involved with multiple co-curricular activities, including student organizations, on-campus employment, and leadership programs. Each experience, while different, may have common lessons. A student-affairs division that focuses on student learning would identify and work towards a set of learning outcomes that are facilitated in each of its programs as well as employing and training professionals who are skilled with helping a student reflect upon his/her experiences in a way that he/she can make connections regarding the lessons learned across the experiences. Assessing the outcomes of learning incorporates an assessment loop where student-affairs professionals can not only collect appropriate data, but also to use these data to evaluate student-learning outcomes and to make decisions that lead to improvements. This competency model supports the idea that student-affairs professionals not only need to develop assessment-specific skills and understandings, but they must also become competent in understanding student learning and being able to foster experiences that help students to most effectively and comprehensively learn (M. J. Bresciani, 2009-2010).

### **Professional Development and Support**

Many current student-affairs professionals did not receive graduate preparation in assessment. This fact presents a clear need for ongoing development for student-affairs

professionals at all levels. It is important that organizations provide opportunities for professional development in addition to and in support of the development provided at the institutional level (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010). Numerous national and regional assessment conferences and institutes have emerged to address the professional-development needs of not only student-affairs professionals, but many also focus on development for academic faculty and staff. Zelna and Dunstan (2012) identified 11 assessment conferences offered across the United States in addition to many conference sessions on assessment that are offered by the various higher-education accrediting agencies. Even in recent years, this number seems to be growing. Additionally, to offer effective educational opportunities, some professional organizations have required more rigorous curriculum standards for professional conference presentations (Janosik, Carpenter, & Creamer, 2006).

At many institutions, support for student-affairs assessment work is in the form of hiring individuals for assessment-coordinator positions. These assessment experts are often located within divisions of student affairs or even within larger student-affairs units. They not only coordinate professional development, but also play a significant role in accelerating an organization's assessment capacity and culture. Assessment-coordinator roles exist in the form of a chair for an assessment committee, a person who has assessment responsibilities as part of his/her position responsibilities, or a full-time person charged with providing leadership within a division or unit of student affairs (Livingston & Zerulik, 2013). While some student-affairs professionals would like to see assessment coordinators take on the full responsibility for assessment (Piper, 2007), Hoffman and Bresciani (2010) conclude that the purposes of these positions are to provide leadership; to foster collaboration; to coordinate training; and to perform division-wide assessment coordination, such as data collection and management, analysis, and

reporting. In addition to assessment-related skills, assessment-coordinator candidates are required to have task-management and leadership skills. Essentially, assessment coordinators provide leadership to stimulate and support assessment practice, as opposed to strictly doing assessment for the division or unit. In 2008, the Student Affairs Assessment Leaders (SAAL) organization was founded to support the professional development of individuals who have assessment-coordinator roles. In 2009, the initial membership consisted of 40 professionals (Elling & Bentrim, 2013), and in 2014, this number grew to 322 members (Elling, 2014). A 2013 survey of the membership revealed that, for 46 of the 86 survey participants, assessment was a full-time position. Most of these positions were situated within student affairs' or academic affairs' central administrative offices.

### **Position Requirements and Responsibilities**

Burkard et al. (2005) conducted a Delphi study with 104 senior and mid-level student-affairs professionals who were current NASPA members to ask questions regarding entry-level position responsibilities as well as the knowledge and skills they expected from entry-level personnel. Of the 27 entry-level positions identified by the experts, most positions involved high levels of student contact, and several had responsibilities for program development and direct service to students. Programming-related responsibilities were ranked at the top of the 26 common responsibilities that were identified by the respondents, yet providing evaluation for the programming was ranked in the bottom half. Additionally, competencies such as program evaluation and research were ranked 23rd and 30th, respectively, among the 32 identified competencies.

If assessment is to become a central responsibility for all student-affairs professionals, then expecting assessment-related knowledge and skills from candidates seeking positions in

student affairs is one way to ensure that these responsibilities can be met. This premise was supported by Hoffman and Bresciani's (2010) examination of assessment-related competencies required for 1,759 jobs posted in 2008 through The Placement Exchange, an online placement site hosted by NASPA. Of all the positions posted, less than one-third (27%) required assessment-related skills or responsibilities. Positions requiring higher levels of education, mostly masters-required or doctorate-preferred, and positions requiring more experience tended to require more assessment-related skills or responsibilities.

These two studies support the notion that developing assessment-related skills and knowledge is most likely cumulative in nature and that professional development in this area should be integrated with multiple opportunities for growth and practice at all professional levels. At the same time, questions remain regarding how much assessment practice has become the responsibility of all student-affairs professionals, including new professionals. Are new professionals simply not prepared to engage in assessment? It could also be that they are not able to make the connection between program development, a frequent responsibility, and assessment practice. Incorporating assessment responsibilities into position descriptions and requiring assessment competencies with position postings can help to ensure that student-affairs professionals are prepared to engage in this work (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2012).

### **Preparation of New Professionals**

The competencies established by professional organizations coincide with and are supported by empirical research regarding the essential competencies expressed by student-affairs professionals at multiple stages in their careers. In 2000, Lovell and Kosten completed a meta-analysis of research published between 1967 and 1997 on the skills, knowledge, and dispositional qualities necessary for student-affairs professional success. Of the 23 studies

analyzed, most of them included a focus on administration, management, and supervision while a little over half of them (13) included research, evaluation, and assessment. The significant gaps in the body of research identified by this meta-analysis include studies in the areas of technology, politics, public policy, and assessment. The researchers noted that, in the contemporary environment of competition and accountability, more research was essential to understand the traits necessary for student-affairs administrators to be able to successfully study and communicate the impact of student-affairs programs.

Although the Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) in Higher Education (2012) established standards for graduate-preparation curricula that should include student learning and development theory as well as assessment, evaluation, and research, graduate programs are not required to follow these standards, nor is there a consistent understanding about what student-affairs professionals must demonstrate upon graduation (Kuk & Hughes, 2002-2003). In their review of literature regarding graduate preparation for student-affairs professionals, Kuk and Hughes (2002-2003) pointed to a clear gap between “what new professionals know and what they can do” (p. 1). In response, the authors advocated for a competency-based approach to graduate preparation that armed graduates with baseline professional competencies that could be utilized immediately with the current knowledge and skills that were acquired in graduate school while, at the same time, preparing them to adjust and innovate as the student-affairs profession evolves in the future. The researchers also recommended that graduate-preparation programs follow the CAS guidelines that call for practical, supervised experiences for new professionals to learn how to successfully transfer theory to practice while they are still under the umbrella of an educational experience.

In *Assessment Reconsidered* (Keeling et al., 2008), the authors call on graduate-preparation programs to integrate assessment into the curriculum; this integration should take place for all programs that intend to foster careers in higher education and student affairs. These authors make a very definitive charge by stating, “There is a vital and immediate need for these graduate programs to develop cogent learning opportunities through which students that will be tomorrow’s higher education professionals can develop the skills and competencies necessary to engage in comprehensive assessment practice” (pp. 97-98). Suggested ways for graduate programs to meet this expectation include modeling assessment practice with a comprehensive assessment plan for the program itself, integrating assessment into each course, and building research-related skills that can be applied to both research and assessment practice.

Additionally, while graduate preparation emphasizes applying theory to practice, little evidence exists that it is happening effectively (Keeling et al., 2008). A stronger skill-level development in applying theory to practice could also serve as a strong foundation for assessment practice. If a practitioner applies a theory to develop and implement programs, then the same theory could be used to assess the program’s effectiveness. M. J. Bresciani’s (2010) inquiry about the barriers of student-affairs professionals’ engagement in student-learning outcomes assessment raises the concern that professionals found it difficult to understand learning theories and, therefore, also had difficulty applying the theories to practice. This preliminary barrier then makes it difficult for student-affairs professionals to know what they should be trying to assess.

**New professionals’ point of view.** New professionals play a critical role in determining how student affairs will be shaped in the future and, therefore, must be equipped to meet changing needs and challenges. M. J. Bresciani (2011) makes a strong, and somewhat unique,



argument for why new professionals should be invested in assessment. Most professionals who have just completed master's level studies come into their positions with new ideas and theoretical backgrounds, but they are also required to work within a pre-existing cultural system. It is sometimes difficult for new professionals to be taken seriously when they have a new idea that they wish to incorporate. However, assessment can empower new professionals to challenge old ways of doing things by providing evidence that change may be a legitimate approach.

While M. J. Bresciani (2011) points out the advantages that assessment practice can have on the level of influence which new professionals can have in their organizations by engaging in assessment, new professionals do not demonstrate this value in their work. Three retrospective studies of new student-affairs professionals serving in their first post-graduate-school positions were completed to understand new professionals' perceptions regarding preparedness for entry-level work and the necessary competencies for their success. Studies by Waple (2006) and Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) focused on broad sets of competencies, grounded in previous research studies, while Hoffmann (2010) focused specifically on assessment competencies.

In Waple's (2006) study, new professionals who had five or fewer years of experience were asked how well they believed their graduate programs had prepared them to attain 28 unique competencies. Participants were also asked to rate the degree to which they found these competencies necessary for their entry-level positions. The researcher-developed and test-piloted survey was sent to 1,237 NASPA members who had entered the field of student affairs within the past 5 years. Of the 773 responders, 430 met the criteria and were included in the study. Among the skills and competencies rated to have been moderately attained in graduate school were student-outcome assessment and assessment of student-affairs programs. These two items were also rated as moderately necessary for the participants' current positions. Waple

noted that, even though there was congruency in how assessment-related skills were rated, it was important to consider how this lower rating affected student-affairs professionals' ability to be prepared to hold future leadership positions. If new professionals do not practice effective assessment from the onset, the following question remains: how will they be able to integrate assessment into their work later?

Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) studied the experiences of 90 new professionals during the year following the completion of their master's degree programs. The results of this qualitative study indicated that a gap exists in moving from a knowledge-based, theoretical study to transferring theory and knowledge into practice. One item that emerged from this study was that new professionals found it difficult to maintain the learning orientation in their positions as they had done during their graduate programs. These participants did not readily recognize the need to continue learning and to actively seek opportunities to do so. Among the skills the new professionals found lacking for which they could use more development was the ability to engage in assessment and evaluation.

Hoffman's (2010) dissertation study of new student-affairs professionals focused on perceptions of preparedness and the practice of assessment-related competencies based on ACPA's (2006) ASK Standards. Although sampling challenges limited the generalizability of this study, it was the only study with new professionals as participants that focused specifically on assessment skills. Even when isolating assessment as the focus, new student-affairs professionals indicated that assessment practice was not as important in their current roles as other responsibilities. This conclusion was consistent with the results in the Waple (2006) and Renn and Jessup-Anger (2008) studies. The specific skills that were rated lowest for both proficiency and importance were quantitative- and qualitative-analysis techniques.

**Expectations and perceptions of the administrators and faculty.** To be successful, graduate programs must match learning outcomes with the professional preparation needed for the new professionals to succeed in the field. Three studies have focused on examining the level of congruence between what new professionals are learning in their graduate programs and the competencies expected from higher-level administrators in student affairs (Dickerson, et al., 2011; Herdlein, 2004; Kuk et al., 2007). Herdlein's (2004) study examined the perceived shortcomings of graduate-preparation programs' effectiveness in developing the necessary competencies for student-affairs professionals by surveying 50 SSAOs from institutions that also offered graduate-preparation programs in areas that were suitable for a career in student affairs. Herdlein used a survey to collect data regarding SSAOs' perceptions about the preparedness of new professionals in 6 broad learning-outcome areas and 12 knowledge/skill areas. In addition, participants answered three open-ended questions about the traits the SSAOs desired with new practitioners and the recommendations that SSAOs would make to revise master's level graduate programs. As a qualitative study, the goal was to examine and analyze data in a way that would extract themes and identify possible gaps in the new professionals' graduate preparation. Competency areas that were noted as lacking for the new graduates included legal knowledge, strategic planning, finance and budgeting, campus politics, proficiency in writing skills, and assessment and research. Some recommendations for graduate programs to fill these gaps included increasing the number of credits required; teaching certain topics, such as writing and assessment, across the curriculum; and offering fewer electives to include more critical topics in the curriculum.

In another study where 60 graduate-preparation faculty, 60 SSAOs, and 60 mid-level student-affairs managers were surveyed regarding their perceptions about the competencies of

new professionals, the researchers found that an understanding of assessment and evaluation as well as the ability to transfer the theory of student development and learning to practice were considered important for each of the three participant groups. The graduate faculty believed that these competencies were being formed in the graduate programs while the senior and mid-level student-affairs professionals perceived that the new professionals were more likely to develop these competencies in practice (Kuk et al., 2007).

Building on these two previous studies, a third study utilized more distinct categories of professional competencies (Dickerson et al., 2011). The researchers surveyed 275 SSAOs and 125 graduate-faculty members regarding their perceptions about the importance of 51 discrete competency areas and their perceptions regarding how well prepared new professionals are in these competency areas. A comparison between the two groups was also done. A 35.5% response rate was achieved with 99 SSAO respondents and 43 faculty respondents. Of the 51 competencies presented for consideration, over two-thirds of the respondents agreed or strongly agreed that 49 of the competencies were desired for new professionals. Testing for the differences between faculty and SSAO ratings, the researchers found no statistical differences for the perceptions between the two groups. Of most interest for this review were the following three competencies: assessment methods in higher education, implementing assessment strategies, and application of theory to practice. Of all the survey respondents, 95.1% strongly agreed that assessment methods in higher education was a desired competency for new student-affairs professionals, yet only 33.8% believed that new professionals could demonstrate this competency in their entry-level positions. Utilizing Cramer's V statistic to test for the level of statistical difference between these two values, per Cohen (as cited in Dickerson et al., 2011, p. 472), this difference is "larger than typical." Regarding new professionals' ability to implement

assessment strategies, 92.3% of the respondents believed that this competency was desirable for new professionals, however, with a 33.8% agreement level that new professionals can demonstrate this competency, a “much larger than typical” gap existed. A similar gap existed for the respondents’ ratings about applying theory to practice, with 94.3% agreement for the importance of this competency and 38.7% agreement that new student-affairs professionals have acquired this competency, a “larger than typical” gap.

Overall, the body of literature regarding graduate preparation demonstrates strong consensus that assessment-related skills, knowledge, and dispositions are important to student-affairs work, but new professionals are not effectively prepared for this work when they graduate from student-affairs preparation programs. Consensus does not exist regarding when professional engagement with assessment work should begin. New professionals believe that assessment is something they will do in the future, whereas faculty and SSAOs believe that new professionals should be engaged in assessment practice from the beginning of their careers. This perspective aligns the professional organizations and writings of other scholars who believe that all professionals must be engaged in assessment work (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010; Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010; Tull & Kuk, 2012). Graduate programs must consider how they are preparing graduates in assessment. Additionally, graduate-preparation programs should foster student dispositions for lifelong learning that will assist student-affairs professionals in the continual development of competencies and abilities to meet the profession’s future challenges (Herdlein, 2004).

### **Ongoing Development for Student-Affairs Professionals**

Professional development beyond graduate school is critical to ensure that all student-affairs professionals maintain basic assessment competencies as well as advance in their

knowledge and skill levels (Janosik et al., 2006). It is important that institutions and divisions of student affairs provide professional-development opportunities that are well-planned, systematic and motivating (Jones, 2009). It is also important that these opportunities include a focus on understanding student-learning theories and the transfer of theoretical knowledge to practice (M. J. Bresciani, 2009-2010; Keeling et al. 2008).

Little research has been conducted regarding the professional-development strategies that are most effective for building assessment capacity. However, suggestions about approaches that have been or could be used for both student-affairs professionals and faculty include opportunities for individuals to engage in a dialogue with each other through coffee groups, common reading discussions (Culp & Dungy, 2012), faculty and staff learning communities (Jones, 2009), and assessment mentors or online communities of practice (Penn, 2012).

Assessment workshops, perhaps utilizing a specific set of competencies to form the curriculum, can foster progressive professional development (Culp & Dungy, 2012). Intentional development through practice, including helping individuals or departments to evaluate their assessment projects and creating opportunities for collaboration between units or with faculty, is another approach. Providing feedback that is formative and relates directly to the work can also lead to more effective assessment practice (Penn, 2012).

### **Assessment Responsibility for All Student-Affairs Professionals**

Assessment practice should be the responsibility of all student-affairs professionals (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010; Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010; Tull & Kuk, 2012), and ideally, most assessment should be completed at the unit level to affect the most direct and positive improvements (Green, Jones, & Aloï, 2008; Schuh & Upcraft, 1998). Assessment is neither something to be added on to position responsibilities (Keeling et al., 2008), nor should it be

considered a short-term project (M. J. Bresciani et al., 2009). Therefore, to develop a competent and prepared team of professionals, assessment responsibility must be integrated into position requirements and responsibilities, staff evaluation, and professional development (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010).

## **Conclusion**

From a collective point of view, evidence indicates that the student-affairs profession is committed to assessment as a critical component of practice and a means to improve student learning. Competency models that focus on assessment skills and knowledge as well as how to enhance student learning have been followed by educational tools and models of best practices to increase the understanding about what assessment is and how to best incorporate it into practice. Professional-development support has come in many forms, such as graduate-level courses, conferences, institutional workshops, modeling of assessment practice by professional organizations, and the addition of assessment coordinators on student-affairs teams. Assessment competency is progressively being incorporated into position qualifications and responsibilities.

Although many efforts are being made to enhance the assessment competencies and practice of student-affairs professionals, the research on how well these efforts are paying off is limited. The studies that have been conducted, mostly with new student-affairs professionals, indicate that a gap still exists between the hope of what new professionals can do in assessment and how well they have prioritized or practiced assessment in their first years on the job. While student-affairs administrators expect new professionals to engage in assessment practice as an integral part of their work, new professionals see assessment as separate and less of a priority than other position responsibilities (Waple, 2006).

Despite many efforts put forward to enhance the practice of assessment in student affairs, this evidence indicates that these efforts are not quite paying off as extensively as hoped. Therefore, searching for ways to fill these gaps could help student affairs to more effectively move the assessment agenda forward. The following portion of this Literature Review examines the concept of Disposition as possible means to make a difference in how effectively student-affairs professionals can integrate assessment into their work.

### **Disposition**

Assessment has been identified as a priority for practice in student affairs as indicated by numerous publications and efforts by professional organizations, graduate programs, institutions, and individual professionals to increase the understanding, competency, and practice of assessment. However, many barriers still exist, and among them is the mindset about assessment and assessment practice. Some professionals see assessment as just one more thing, among many other competing responsibilities, to do (Blimling, 2013; M. J. Bresciani, 2009-2010; Payne & Miller, 2009; Piper, 2007; Roberts, 2012). Others resist the idea of assessment (Blimling, 2013; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Roberts, 2012; Slager & Oaks, 2013), sometimes believing that it is just a passing fad (Roberts, 2012) or having a lack of trust that assessment results are legitimate or really matter (Payne & Miller, 2009; Roberts, 2012). For some professionals, the focus on assessment to address accountability has also instilled a sense of fear that assessment results will reflect poorly on individuals or organizations (M. J. Bresciani, 2009-2010; Piper, 2007; Slager & Oaks, 2013). As previously indicated in this review, new professionals believe that assessment is important but that it will become more important in their work later in their careers (Hoffman, 2010). New professionals are not able to connect the idea that effective program development and implementation should include assessment (Waple, 2006).



The following sections explore the idea that, in addition to acquiring skills and knowledge about assessment and working in an environment where assessment is encouraged and supported, a person's disposition, or mindset, can make a critical difference in his/her ability to effectively engage in assessment and to integrate it with his/her daily practice. The first section provides evidence that exploring disposition in the context of student-affairs assessment work has merit. In the second section, disposition is more fully defined. The final section reviews how disposition has been viewed in other disciplines and how mindset has been researched in the field of psychology.

### **Disposition Matters in Student-Affairs Assessment**

As addressed in previous sections of this Literature Review, the student-affairs profession has placed a special focus on supporting the incorporation of assessment into the heart of student-affairs work. The ASK Standards (ACPA, 2006), the *Professional Competency Areas for Practitioners* (ACPA & NASPA, 2010), and later, the *Professional Competency Areas for Educators* (ACAP & NASPA, 2015) were each developed to provide a framework for competencies and the development of student-affairs professionals. Many institutions have worked to create cultures of assessment that provide support and resources for work in this area. However, it may be that a focus on the disposition of individual student-affairs professionals may be missing.

The social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1999), as depicted in the Figure 2 below, provides a model for new behavior or learning where personal factors, behaviors, and environmental factors are inseparable and intertwined. In other words, it is the constant interactions among these three factors that help an individual to learn and grow as well as to practice new behaviors.

A key concept of this model is that it includes a person's skills and knowledge, the person's

interaction with his/her environment, *and* his/her beliefs and attitudes. Applying this model to student-affairs professionals would indicate that having certain beliefs and attitudes about assessment can have as much of an impact as having the right skills and knowledge as well as working in the right environment.

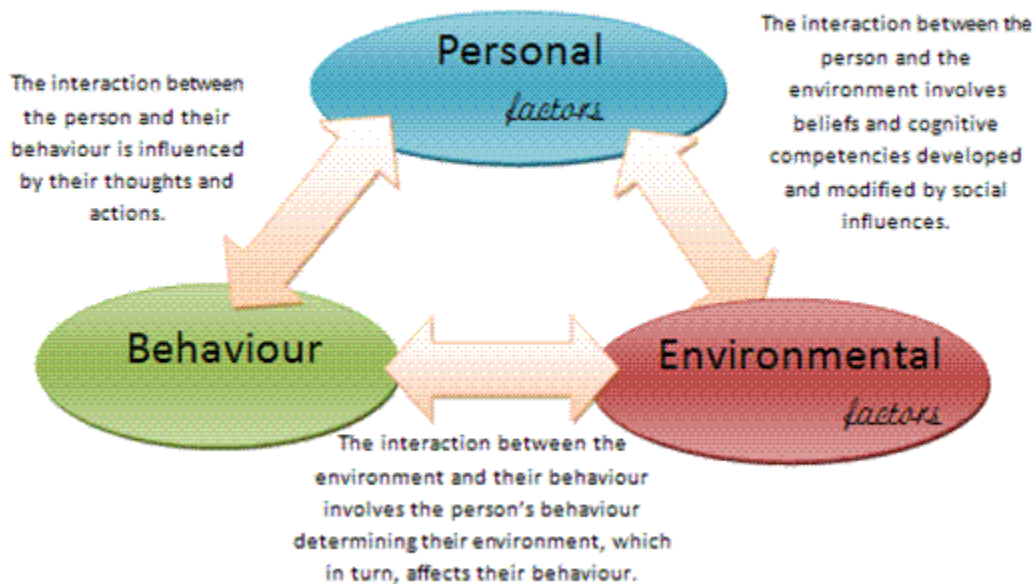


Figure 2. Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory (n.d.). In *PremedHQ*. Retrieved from <https://www.premedhq.com/social-cognitive-theory>.

Within the profession, there are signs that disposition matters in the development of student-affairs professionals, but this concept has not been fully developed, especially in terms of how disposition relates to assessment practice. In Burkard, et al.'s (2005) Delphi study about the entry-level competencies of new student-affairs professionals, among the top competencies identified by SSAOs were personal qualities such as flexibility, interpersonal relations, and creativity. Hoffman and Bresciani (2012) researched emerging competencies that were desired by employers, as expressed in position openings for student-affairs professionals, and found that a broad range of dispositional characteristics, such as creativity, enthusiasm, flexibility, and a

positive attitude, were included among the list of skills, knowledge, and experiences that were also desired. The ASK Standards “seek to articulate the areas of knowledge, skill, and disposition that student affairs professionals need to perform as practitioner-scholars to assess the degree to which students are mastering the learning and development outcomes we intend as professionals” (ACPA, 2006, p. 4). However, beyond the introductory paragraphs of the ASK Standards, the term *disposition* is not further used. In the revised version of the *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (ACPA & NASPA, 2015), special attention is given to the term *disposition*, choosing it over *attitude* which was used along with *knowledge* and *skills* in the document’s earlier version. The authors pointed out that *disposition* is a more encompassing term and is reflective of the terminology being used for other education research and literature. While disposition was included as a component of the competencies, further mention of it was reserved for the competency areas of *Personal and Ethical Foundations* and *Values, Philosophy, and History*. Competencies in the *Assessment, Evaluation, and Research* area remain more focused on knowledge and skills.

Love and Estanek (2004) proposed that, for student-affairs assessment to be most effective and sustained, individual professionals must develop an assessment mindset. To have an assessment mindset means to utilize assessment to shape one’s view of the world and, therefore, to view his/her individual student-affairs practice from this perspective as well. “That is, student-affairs professionals who consciously and intentionally gather, analyze, and interpret evidence that describes their individual effectiveness and use that evidence to improve their effectiveness” (p. 90). Love and Estanek equated the learning process with the assessment process in that both require observing and reflecting, making connections, and deciding how to respond. In this case, assessment becomes a much more natural part of professional practice as

opposed to something that has been imposed upon student-affairs professionals for reasons of accountability.

### **What is Disposition?**

Although the terms and definitions surrounding disposition vary, these differences tend to be subtle. Merriam-Webster (“Disposition,” n.d.) defines disposition as “a tendency to act or think in a particular way.” Harrison, McAfee, Smithey, and Weiner (2006) use a similar definition related to teacher dispositions: “Disposition is a mood, an attitude or a tendency or inclination to behave in a certain way” (p. 72). Katz (1993) defined disposition as “a tendency to exhibit frequently, consistently, and voluntarily a pattern of behavior” (p. 2). Each definition implies that disposition can either be a state of being or a propensity towards certain behaviors. Closely related terms include *mindset* (“Disposition”, n.d.; Dweck, 2006; Love & Estanek, 2004), *habit of mind* (Wilkerson & Lang, 2007), and even *matters of the heart* (Harrison et al., 2006). Other words associated with *disposition* and often considered components of disposition include *attitude*, *belief*, and *value* (“NCATE Glossary,” n.d.). Dispositions can be observed by what a person writes, says, or does (Harrison et al., 2006). Because one of the purposes of this study is to develop an understanding about assessment disposition, a previously unexplored phenomenon, the definition of disposition will broadly include most, if not all, of these concepts. As such, for this study, disposition is defined as the attitudes, beliefs, and values that precipitate habits of behavior or action. A synonym for disposition includes the term *mindset* (“Disposition”, n.d.; Dweck, 2006; Love & Estanek, 2004).

### **Further Exploration of the Disposition**

Covey (1998) encouraged “a new level of thinking” (p. 21) as a means for personal success, implying that, to be successful, individuals should start with their internal perspectives

about themselves, reflecting upon how they see the world and on what motivates them. How we think leads to action that eventually turns to habits that essentially impact overall success. The importance of disposition or attitude has been emphasized in other discussions regarding success. To have the right knowledge and skills, but also the wrong attitude, can be counterproductive and, in some cases, even damaging (Tan & Kaufmann, 2010).

The “KASH Box” (n.d.) in Figure 3 below has been used to represent important components of personal and business success. Individuals, businesses, or organizations tend to focus on the development of knowledge and skills. Failing to recognize that attitudes and habits also play a role in overall success can lead some people to not meet their full potential and, in some cases, to failure.



*Figure 3.* Knowledge, attitude, skills, and habits (KASH) model. KASH box. (n.d.). N Vision Business Solutions. Retrieved August 30, 2015, from <http://www.nvisionbusiness.com/k.php>.

The development of student dispositions has emerged as an important educational goal, mainly from two different perspectives. First, Costa and Kallick (2014) propose that teaching should focus as much on fostering dispositions for learning as on content knowledge and skill development. For example,

Might we give equal attention to students’ reading skills as well as their love of reading; their knowledge of scientific principles as well as their curiosity, intrigue, and wonderment about scientific phenomena; their knowledge and

application of mathematical processes as well as their persistence with complex problems? (p. 3)

Because the world has become more complex, having a disposition for learning becomes more valuable. Skills and knowledge can be finite while a disposition to learn expands the possibilities for dealing with the world's complexities exponentially. Similarly, Katz (1993) believes that disposition is an important educational goal, along with skills, knowledge, and feelings. It is the disposition that will help individuals act upon the skills and knowledge gained from the educational experience. Without a disposition to act, skills and knowledge can become devalued or even useless.

The National Council for the Accreditation of Teacher Education (NCATE) is one of the accrediting bodies, as designated by the United States Department of Education, for colleges and universities that prepare teachers for elementary and secondary education. In 2008, the disposition of teacher candidates was added to the accreditation standards along with the already existing standards regarding skills and knowledge. In 2010, NCATE and the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC) agreed to consolidate into one accrediting body, The Council for the Accreditation of Educator Preparation (CAEP). This merger will be fully complete in 2016 ("History of CAEP," n.d.), and the standards will continue to include the disposition of teacher candidates as a component of accreditation. Teacher-preparation programs are encouraged to measure the attitudes, values, and behaviors of teacher-candidate applicants prior to program admission. This measurement of disposition, based on an attitude, values, and behaviors screening tool, is also referred to as the candidate's "teaching promise" (Allen, Coble, & Crowe, 2015, p. 6).

## **The Psychology of Mindset**

Dweck's (2006) psychological research on mindset presents some of the strongest evidence that disposition matters for personal and professional success. Over the course of more than 20 years, Dweck conducted and published an extensive body research in the areas of personality, social psychology, and developmental psychology. Utilizing this body of work, she developed the theory that there exist two mindset types, a fixed mindset and a growth mindset. The type of mindset that one embodies can significantly impact a person's perceptions, decisions, and actions. The fixed mindset is characterized by a belief that one's qualities are set and unchangeable. Individuals with a fixed mindset often focus on proving their abilities and being successful; for these people, feedback is most exciting when it focuses on reinforcing their perceptions about their abilities. Feedback regarding ways to learn or improve is of less interest. On the other hand, the growth mindset envelops the belief that one's basic qualities can be developed through effort. People with a growth mindset are more focused on stretching themselves and learning how they can improve. Feedback regarding how they can improve is exciting and seen as an opportunity.

Dweck's (2006) extensive review of mindset focuses on the different impacts that a fixed and growth mindset can have on how an individual will respond to challenges, obstacles, effort, criticism, and the success of others. As depicted in Figure 4, individuals with a fixed mindset avoid challenges as much as possible while people with a growth mindset embrace them. A growth mindset also fosters more persistence, a valuing of effort to progress, and openness to criticism that can lead to learning. Regarding the success of others, people with a fixed mindset are more likely threatened by that success while individuals with a growth mindset see it as

educational and inspiring. Ultimately, people with a growth mindset achieve more than individuals with a fixed mindset.

Per Dweck (2006), it is possible to develop a growth mindset. In her work with youth, she found that the simple act of raising students' awareness about the two mindsets can entice movement towards a growth mindset. Additionally, when students learned about how the brain functions, they were able begin changing their mindset about their own abilities towards learning and performance. For adults who may have grown up with a fixed mindset and perhaps even been rewarded for it, making the change towards a growth mindset can be difficult but not impossible. There are four steps when making the change from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset ("The Nature of Change," n.d.). First, recognize the messages of a fixed mindset, and identify them when they are happening. Second, identify that, in each situation, there is a choice to be made regarding how to view it. Third, even if a growth mindset does not come naturally, approach situations from a growth mindset. Finally, act upon the situation with a growth-mindset approach. As a person practices by taking these steps, experiencing situations with a growth mindset can become more natural and desirable.



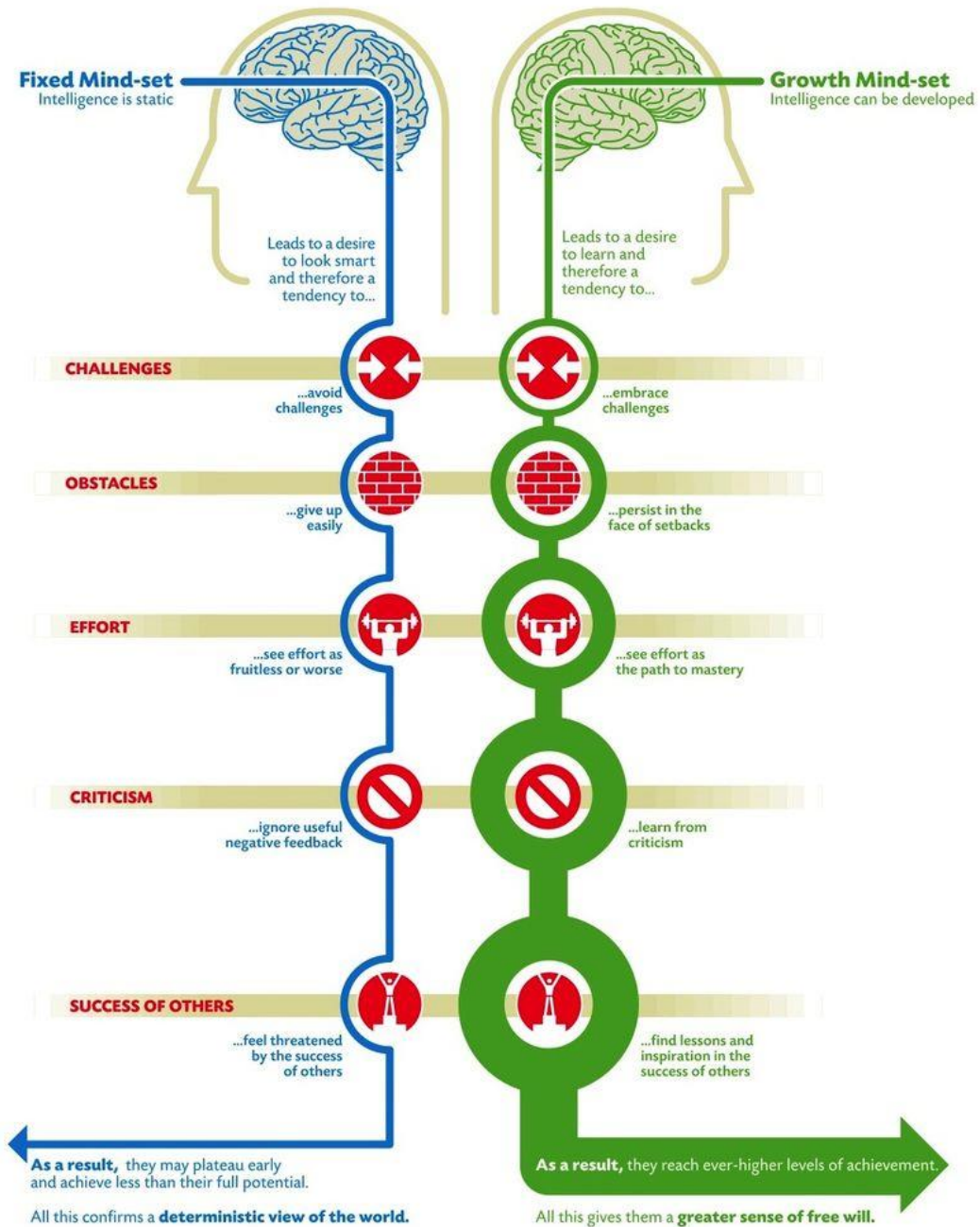


Figure 4. Two mindsets by Carol Dweck, PhD. From Holmes, N. (n.d.). Two mindsets. Retrieved from <http://nigelholmes.com/graphic/two-mindsets-standford-magazine/>. Reprinted with permission from artist.

## **Conclusion**

Disposition, or mindset, can have a significant impact on how individuals approach life and work. Having knowledge and skills, or even natural talent, in a certain area does not necessarily guarantee success, especially long-term success. This statement is true for many areas and challenges in life, and it can also be true for student-affairs professionals with their approach to assessment. Having the appropriate skills and knowledge is important; however, having a growth-oriented mindset can be a critical component for effectively using the skills and knowledge about assessment to successfully incorporate assessment into daily work. Ultimately, this premise may be the difference between the successful assessment movement for student affairs and a stagnant movement where assessment is important, but not effectively integrated into student-affairs work. The next chapter describes a research study meant to expand what is known about how student-affairs professionals can become more successful in assessment by developing an assessment disposition. Specifically, the proposed study seeks to flesh out the characteristics of an assessment disposition and to explore the ways it could be developed by student-affairs professionals.

## **Chapter Summary**

The sections of this Literature Review chronicle a story about the history of higher education and student affairs, how assessment has become a central and necessary component of work in higher education, and how the student-affairs profession and practitioners are making efforts to incorporate assessment into their work. While much has been done to improve assessment practice in student affairs, evidence indicates that there is still work to be done and more to know about how this task can be accomplished. This chapter concludes with an

exploration about disposition as a possible missing link when it comes to helping student-affairs professionals integrate assessment into their work.

Higher education in the United States, which started as an institution for the few and elite, has become a central component of American culture as well as a high-stakes component of the country's economy, American status in the world, and the prosperity of its citizens. These factors, along with the increasing costs and depleting resources for higher education, have resulted in an expectation and a necessity for educators to demonstrate effectiveness and efficiency when facilitating the ultimate goal of higher education: student learning. Although assessment is not a new concept in higher education, the climate of accountability has precipitated a movement for all aspects of higher education, initially, to meet accountability demands and, more recently, to incorporate continuous improvement for student learning. Student affairs is an integral part of higher education and a collaborative partner with faculty in the development and education of students. Although the student-affairs profession was founded with the belief that assessment and continuous improvement are important, more recently, assessment has been at the forefront of importance for student-affairs practice. Much effort has been put forward to help student-affairs professionals develop skills and knowledge about assessment and to support this work. However, the focus on skills and knowledge has not been enough to successfully transform student-affairs professionals in the full integration of assessment with their daily practice. As with other professional areas, the consideration of disposition as a third component of success is necessary to further explore. Love and Estanek (2004) introduced the idea that mindset can make a difference in how effectively student-affairs professionals integrate assessment into their daily work. This study is meant to explore this idea from a research perspective.

## CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY AND PROCEDURES

This chapter presents the methodology and procedures that were used to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the defining qualities of a student-affairs professional who demonstrates an assessment disposition?
2. How can the qualities of an assessment disposition be developed in student-affairs professionals?

Included in this chapter is a description of the following elements of the research plan: (a) the research design, specifically information about the Delphi methodology; (b) the research process, including the research timeline; (c) the research participants; and (d) the interview and Delphi survey protocols, including the selection of participants, instrumentation, data collection, and data analysis for each protocol. A summary follows these sections and concludes the chapter.

### **Research Design—The Delphi Method**

The research questions were explored using the Delphi method, sometimes referred to as the Delphi technique. Delphi is a research methodology that has been widely accepted and used to seek consensus among experts regarding real-world questions about specific topic areas (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). Developed by the RAND Corporation in the 1950s to explore research questions regarding national-security issues for the United States Air Force, the method was introduced to the public when Dalkey and Helmer published their first article about the Delphi method in 1963 (von der Gracht, 2012). Since then, the Delphi method has been used in numerous studies, with a significant resurgence since 2005 (von der Gracht, 2012). Per Linstone and Turoff (2002), this structured group-communication process is “effective in allowing a group of individuals, as a whole, to deal with a complex problem” (p. 3). Skulmoski et al. (2007)

describe the Delphi technique as a flexible approach to explore new concepts and a good research approach for problems or phenomena where knowledge about them is limited or even unknown. For these reasons, the Delphi method was selected for this study.

As a distinctive research process, “the Delphi method solicits the opinion of experts through a series of carefully designed questionnaires interspersed with information and opinion feedback in order to establish a convergence of opinion” (“Delphi Method,” n.d.). Although the Delphi method has been used to address a wide variety of research situations, three characteristics are common and critical for all Delphi studies: anonymity, iterations of controlled feedback, and statistical group response (Dalkey, 1967; von der Gracht, 2012).

Anonymity is established by having all individual participant’s responses submitted directly to the researcher or moderator. The advantages of this approach include a reduction of participants being influenced by others, especially by more dominant participants. Additionally, participants are not only freer to express their true opinion, but are also less hesitant to change their opinion because the possibilities of losing face in front of their peers are diminished or eliminated. The ability for participants to express uncertain opinions without fear of judgement also tends to influence higher participation rates (von der Gracht, 2012). In general, the anonymity quality of the Delphi method is more effective in reducing group-think than other methods where participants discuss topics face-to-face (Dalkey, 1969).

The Delphi process typically begins with the creation of a questionnaire and follows with iterations of controlled feedback. The questionnaire may be based on a review of literature for the topic or expert feedback collected during the first round of the Delphi process (Day & Bobeva, 2005; Hsu & Sanford, 2007). During the Delphi process, the researcher summarizes the questionnaire responses and provides collective group responses to each participant (Hsu &

Sanford, 2007). This controlled feedback is typically provided in the form of aggregate statistical data (von der Gracht, 2012). Participants review the group responses and are asked to reply to the synthesized data. During each round, participants may modify their own responses to express consensus with the group or may provide rationale about why they do not fully agree with the group (Hsu & Sanford, 2007).

Consensus and how to measure it are not clearly defined by the literature. There are many variations on how researchers have decided what constitutes consensus (von der Gracht, 2012). The definition of the term *consensus* also leaves much room for interpretation. Merriam-Webster (“Consensus,” n.d.) defines consensus as “a general agreement about something: an idea or opinion that is shared by all people in the group.” This definition leaves a wide range of options for measuring if consensus has been achieved. Researchers have used many different statistical analyses to determine consensus, some simple and others more complex. Although measuring consensus based on a certain level or percentage of agreement may be simple, it can be sufficient for certain studies, particularly for studies that use nominal or Likert-type scales to determine agreement or disagreement (von de Gracht, 2012).

The question about when to terminate Delphi rounds is a decision that each researcher makes individually (Dajani, Sincoff, & Talley, 1979; von der Gracht, 2012). While consensus is desired with a Delphi study, a lack of consensus also provides important information about the research subject. Therefore, iterations typically continue until a stability of responses is established, not necessarily until consensus is reached. Stability is characterized by a consistency of responses from one round to another, as measured by a 15% or lower change in responses (von der Gracht, 2012).

Dajani et al. (1979) provide guidance for researchers who are considering when to terminate Delphi rounds (Figure 5). Instability with the group responses indicates that another round is necessary. Once stability is established, researchers may consider the level of agreement among participants and then make an informed judgement about when to terminate. If consensus, meaning all participants agree, is reached or a majority, more than 50%, of the participants, agree, rounds can be terminated. If there is bipolarity, represented by an equal division of opinions, or plurality, where a larger number but less than 50% of the group agrees, the researcher should examine the details further to make an informed decision regarding termination or continuation. If there is clear disagreement among participants, the researcher may choose to terminate, especially if several rounds have failed to reach consensus. Otherwise, a new round should be initiated.

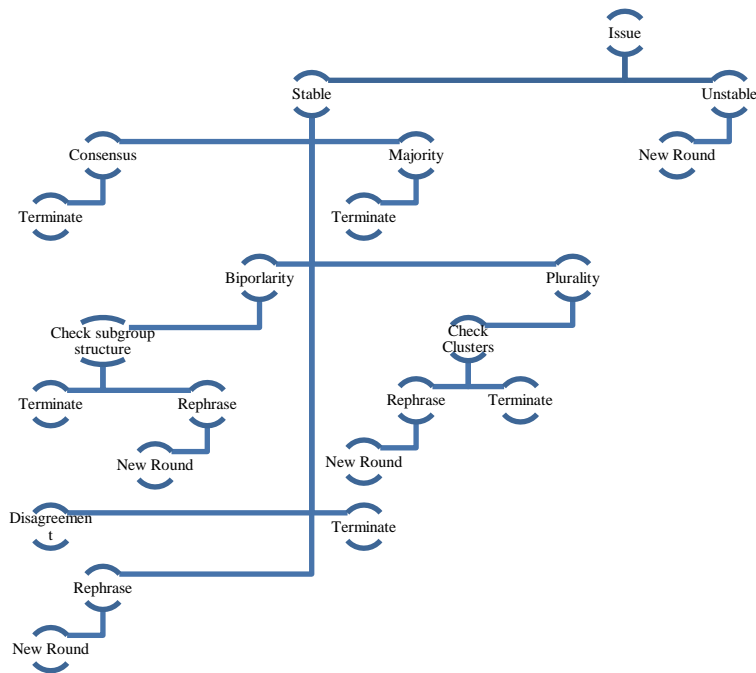


Figure 5. Hierarchical stopping criteria for Delphi studies. Adapted from “Stability and Agreement Criteria for the Termination of Delphi Studies” by J. S. Dajani, M. Z. Sincoff, and W. K. Talley, 1979, *Technological Forecasting and Social Change*, 13(1), p. 85. Copyright 1979 by Elsevier North-Holland, Inc.

## Researcher Positionality

The nature of this study necessitates that the positionality of the researcher be addressed. Doing so will not only provide transparency and reveal potential researcher bias, but will also help readers more fully understand the implications of this study and the role of the researcher. Acknowledging the personal experiences behind the researcher role, it is also the only time first-person perspective will be used in this dissertation.

I am a student-affairs professional with over 30 years of experience working within higher education to provide student services and support student learning. Having worked in this field since the beginning of the assessment movement, as described earlier in the literature review, I have experienced this movement first-hand. My graduate school training in student affairs included training in research, but not assessment. As a new professional in the mid-1990s I had the opportunity to listen to a speaker as part of a student affairs division-wide training. The speaker was Dr. Lee Upcraft and he was talking about assessment in student affairs. I found his talk interesting, but not compelling. Around the same time, however, I had the opportunity to attend a conference focused on *The Student Learning Imperative* (ACPA, 1996). This experience was extremely interesting to me, and thus began my disposition for student learning.

My next position in student affairs was created to specifically enhance student learning in the residence halls. As part of this responsibility I developed an interest in understanding how to intervene with students-at-risk for failing out of college. A colleague and I embarked on a study to explore this topic, and thus my disposition for assessment began. My responsibilities for assessment grew and eventually coordination for my department's assessment efforts was formally placed into my position description. I sought opportunities on my own to develop my assessment knowledge and skills through literature, conferences, a certificate program, and an



institute. When I began my doctoral work in institutional analysis I was pleased that there would be a course in assessment.

This self-reflection reveals that I am very much like the student-affairs professionals who are the subjects for this study. I acknowledge as the researcher for a topic in which I not only have experience but has been part of my formation as a professional, I bring a certain level of bias to this study. At the same time, my experiences contribute to the research process by having a good understanding of assessment and the formation of an assessment disposition.

### **Research Process**

Research for this study began after a request was submitted to North Dakota State University's Institutional Review Board (IRB) and the research protocol was approved (Appendix A). Based on IRB guidelines and the nature of this study, an exempt status was requested and obtained. Preceding the Delphi survey rounds, individual interviews were conducted with four student-affairs assessment experts. The development of interview questions was guided by major themes from the Literature Review as well as the research questions. Data from the interviews was utilized to develop the Delphi survey. The Delphi procedure was conducted using email correspondence and Qualtrics survey software. Three survey rounds were conducted for this study. The overall research process is depicted in Figure 6, and the research activities and completion dates are shown in Table 2.

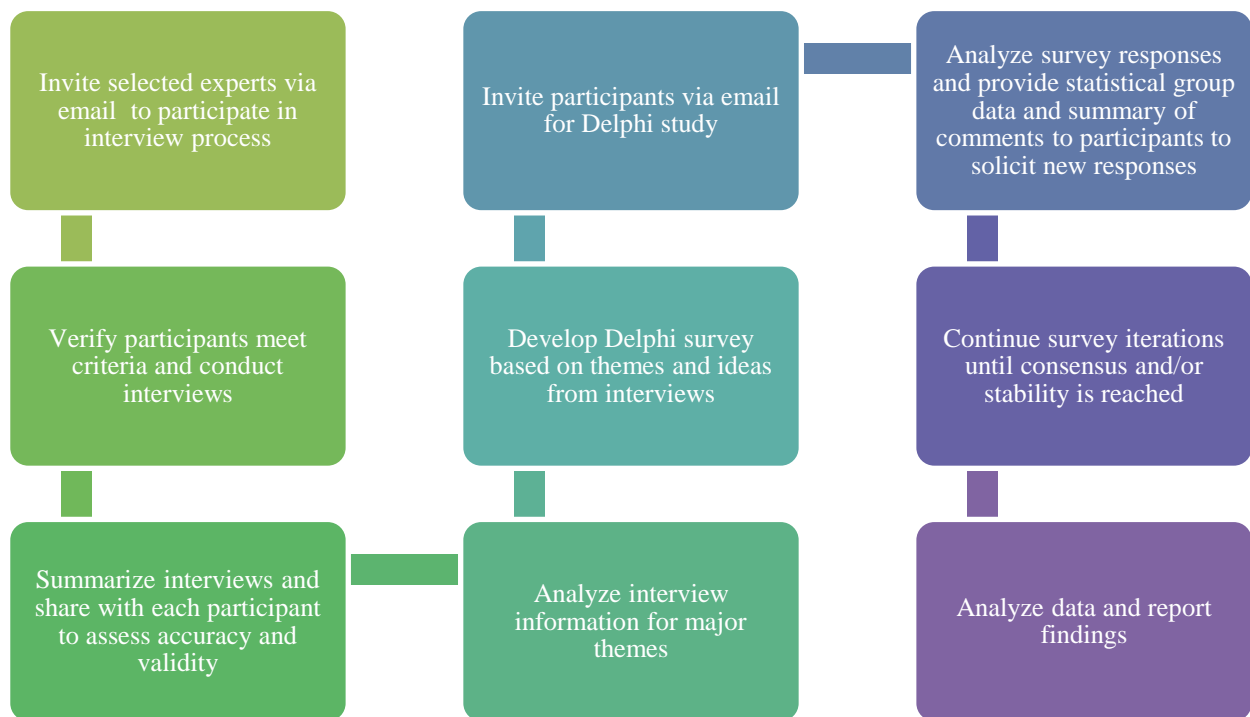


Figure 6. Research process.

Table 2  
Research Timeline

Research Activity	Completion Date
Met with doctoral committee to present proposal	November 30, 2015
Received IRB approval	February 4, 2016
Sent interview invitations and consent forms to prospective participants	February 16, 2016
Conducted and recorded interviews	February 22, 2016
Summarized and validated interview responses with participants	April 4, 2016
Sent Delphi survey 1 invitations to prospective participants	June 1, 2016
Closed Delphi round-one survey	June 15, 2016
Opened Delphi round-two survey and sent link to participants	July 11, 2016
Closed Delphi round-two survey	July 22, 2016
Opened Delphi round-three survey and sent link to participants	August 16, 2016
Closed Delphi round-three survey	September 6, 2016
Conducted data analysis and submitted Chapters 1-4 to the doctoral committee	February 11, 2017
Attended Chapter 4 meeting with the doctoral committee	February 28, 2017
Presented the final defense	April 13, 2017

## **Participants**

Evidence indicates that for student-affairs assessment to be effective and truly improve practice and student learning, all student-affairs professionals must develop competency in this area (ACPA & NASPA, 2010; M. J. Bresciani, 2012). Many institutions have created full-time student-affairs assessment coordinator positions to support this work by providing expertise in assessment and leadership for the coordination of assessment activities. Part of this leadership includes working directly with the student-affairs professionals in more programmatic or practitioner roles to help them successfully incorporate assessment with their daily practice (Livingston & Zerulik, 2013). These coordinators are considered assessment experts and are uniquely qualified to recognize the qualities of student-affairs professionals who demonstrate an assessment disposition. Therefore, the expert participants for this study were individuals who either currently hold assessment-coordinator positions or have held these positions in the past. The experts were drawn from institutions across the United States. To ensure that participants have the experiences to contribute to this study, it was necessary that they have at least one year of experience working in higher-education assessment and at least a portion of their responsibilities are or provided direct support and collaboration for assessment with other student-affairs professionals. In other words, the participants must have experience that has allowed them the opportunity to observe student-affairs professionals who have, and perhaps those who have not, successfully incorporated assessment into their daily practice.

### **Procedure for Selecting Experts**

Potential study participants were identified from several resources. The Student Affairs Assessment Leaders (SAAL) is an online group of professionals who coordinate assessment in student affairs; both ACPA and NASPA have organized leadership groups that are focused on

supporting and improving assessment for student affairs. Many of these leaders hold fulltime assessment-coordinator roles and were included in the list of possible participants. Individuals who were identified as potentially qualified were invited to participate in the study. Screening survey questions were used to determine if they met the expert criteria.

### **Interview Protocol**

Prior to the Delphi survey rounds, five individuals were selected by the researcher to participate in individual interviews and an email invitation was sent (Appendix B). All five individuals agreed to be interviewed, however, scheduling conflicts resulted in one individual not being able to participate in this portion of the study. Therefore, four individual interviews were conducted with these assessment-coordinator experts on February 19 and 22, 2016. The four participants each had at least one year of experience working in higher education assessment and at least a portion of their responsibility is or provided direct support and collaboration for assessment with student-affairs professionals. The four experts who agreed to participate were:

- Becki Elkins, Registrar and Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa;
- Bill Heinrich, Director of Assessment, Michigan State University, Lansing, Michigan;
- Gavin Henning, Associate Director of Higher Education and Director of Educational Administration Programs, New England College, Boston, Massachusetts; and
- Vicki Wise, Associate Director for Teaching, Learning and Assessment, Portland State University, Portland, Oregon.

Once the interview participants were identified and consent was confirmed (Appendix C), the interviews were conducted and recorded. Summaries of the individual responses were sent via email to the interview participants to confirm accuracy and validity. Information from the

interviews was analyzed for major themes and then used to create the survey instrument for the first round of the Delphi procedure. Interview participants had already met the participant criteria for the Delphi study and, therefore, were included in the invitations to participate in the rest of the study.

### **Instrumentation**

The interview protocol and questions were developed by the researcher based on information from the Literature Review and the research questions (Appendix D). The interview protocol included 12 major questions with possible follow-up questions, depending upon each participant's answers. Included were questions about the experts' opinions regarding the values, attitudes, and beliefs of student-affairs professionals who successfully incorporate assessment into their daily work. Additional questions focused on ways the disposition could be developed in student-affairs professionals.

### **Data Collection**

Invitations to participate in the interviews were emailed to five individuals, selected by the researcher, from the database of potential participants with the intent of selecting a geographically diverse sample. Of these, four individuals could participate. The invitation included a copy of the informed consent form with instructions for response (Appendix C). Interview appointments were scheduled with those who agreed to participate and who met the expert criteria. The protocol included confirmation of each participants' review of the informed consent, verbal willingness to participate, an explanation of definitions being used for the study, and confirmation that each participant met the criteria as student-affairs assessment experts, as defined earlier. Three interviews were conducted via the telephone and one interview was conducted via Skype™. Once the interviews were completed, the researcher summarized each

individual interview utilizing the recordings to capture meaning and employ the participants' language as much as possible. Then, the summaries were sent to each participant to check for accuracy and validation. Initial analysis of the interview data began when the researcher chose to summarize the participants' responses rather than transcribe them. The participants' confirmation of accuracy supported the researcher's organization of the data and captured meanings.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the interviews is qualitative in nature. Therefore, a qualitative analysis approach of Descriptive and In Vivo coding (Saldeña, 2013) was used to first extract primary topics from the various statements made by the interviewees and, when appropriate, utilizing the participants' own language to summarize the data. Secondary analysis organized the data into the following broad categories: general descriptors; behaviors or habits; attitudes; values; beliefs; observed attitudes, values, or beliefs; strategies for development; and development practices. Utilizing Excel software to track and sort, the data was organized into themes, and question stems were developed for the Delphi survey instrument. This analysis resulted in 47 statements regarding qualities of an assessment-disposition that were divided into eight thematic question blocks and 48 statements regarding ways an assessment-disposition could be developed, divided into an additional eight question blocks. In a few instances, new statements were presented in survey rounds two and three, based on comments from panelists during the previous rounds.

### **Delphi Survey Protocol**

The Delphi procedure was conducted using email correspondence and Qualtrics survey software. The initial survey instrument was developed based on the themes and ideas that

emerged from the interviews and focused on answering the research questions. The Delphi process included participant completion of the survey, researcher analysis of the group data, and controlled feedback sent back to participants for a response. Three iterations of this process were conducted with items that did not reach consensus carried through to the next survey iteration.

### **Delphi Survey Round-One**

The invitation to participate in the Delphi survey process and a link to the survey was sent to 91 individuals working at institutions across the United States and identified by the researcher as possibly fitting the criteria to participate in the study. Of these, 10 did not receive the email messages because the email either bounced or failed, 45 did not participate in the survey, five started the survey but did not finish, one completed all the survey questions but did not provide contact information to be used for the second-round survey, one finished the survey but skipped three questions within the survey, and 27 completed the entire survey, including providing contact information. Analysis of the round one survey included data from the 29 individuals who completed the survey, including data from the one individual who skipped a few questions and the individual who did not provide contact information. Although there is not clear guidance in the literature regarding the optimal number of participants in a Delphi study, recommendations indicate that a panel of 15 to 50 experts provides a number that is large enough for effective representation of opinions, but not so large that the process would take up significant amounts of the participants' time and risk a higher drop-out rate through the process than desired (Hsu & Sanford, 2007).

All 29 individuals whose responses were included in the results for round one met the criteria for participation by having at least one year of experience working in higher-education assessment and at least a portion of their responsibilities having provided direct support and

collaboration for assessment with student-affairs professionals. Participants represented a diversity of institutions across the United States. The institutions where participants were working at the time of the first survey completion are summarized in Table 3. Of the 29 initial participants, 23 worked at a public institution, six worked at a private institution, and all participants were working at a 4-year institution. The majority, 25 participants, were working at a large institution (greater than 10,000 students), three participants worked at a medium-sized institution (between 3,000 and 9,999 students), and only one worked at a small institution (1,000-2,999 students). Participants represented all regions of the United States with 10 working at institutions in the Midwest (Iowa, Illinois, Indiana, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, North Dakota, Nebraska, Ohio, South Dakota, and Wisconsin), 10 in the Southeast (Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, and West Virginia), four in the West (Alaska, California, Colorado, Hawaii, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming), three in the Southwest (Arizona, New Mexico, Oklahoma, and Texas), and two in the Northeast (Connecticut, District of Columbia, Delaware, Massachusetts, Maryland, Maine, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, and Vermont).



Table 3

*Institutional Characteristics of Delphi Round-One Participants*

		Participants	Percentage
Type of Institution	Public, 4-year	23	79.31%
	Private, 4-year	6	20.69%
Size of Institution	Large	25	86.21%
	Medium	3	10.34%
	Small	1	3.45%
Region of United States where Institution is Located	Midwest	10	34.48%
	Northeast	2	6.90%
	Southeast	10	34.48%
	West	4	13.79%
	Southwest	3	10.34%

Regarding the positions in which the participants were working, all but two positions involved at least 25% responsibility working with student-affairs professionals on assessment. The positions of 11 participants included over 75% of their responsibilities working with student-affairs professionals on assessment. The highest level of education for participants is either a master's degree (8) or a doctoral degree (21). The average number of years' participants had worked in higher education was 15 years, with an average of 8 years working in higher-education assessment and an average of 7 years working in student-affairs assessment. The various position responsibilities related to assessment carried out by the participants are depicted in Table 4. All participants (29) were involved in providing training and development, while overseeing the institutional accreditation process was a responsibility of the least number of participants (5).

Table 4

*Position Responsibilities of Delphi Round-One Participants*

Responsibility	Count	Percentage
Provide assessment training and development	29	100.00%
Coordinate student affairs assessment with others	27	93.10%
Conduct student affairs assessment	24	82.76%
Facilitate strategic planning	20	68.97%
Coordinate institutional assessment with others	19	65.52%
Conduct institutional assessment	11	37.93%
Oversee institutional accreditation process	5	17.24%

The Delphi survey was structured and developed based on the two research questions and the data from the individual interviews after qualitative analysis by the researcher. The survey was piloted for feedback and edits with four student-affairs professionals prior to the final version of the survey being made available to potential participants. The round one Delphi survey included the two screening questions, 16 demographic questions, followed by 47 statements regarding qualities of an assessment-disposition and 48 statements regarding ways an assessment-disposition could be developed (Appendix H). The statements were grouped into 16 blocks, based on thematic similarities among statements in each block. Placing statements into blocks also divided the survey into more manageable sections. Having 95 stand-alone statements could exacerbate the potential for survey fatigue. For each statement, participants could express their opinion via a Likert-type scale of *strongly agree*, *agree*, *uncertain*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree*. Additionally, participants were invited to provide any comments they had regarding statements within each block.

The first survey invitation was sent to potential participants via email on June 1, 2016 (Appendix G). The invitation included a link to the online survey. The informed consent information was located on the first page of the survey and consent to participate in the survey

was indicated by continuation onto the next page. Participants were asked to complete the survey by June 15, 2016. Reminder emails were sent to participants who had not yet completed the survey on June 8 and June 14, 2016.

Data from the first-round Delphi survey was analyzed by combining *agree* and *strongly agree* responses, combining *disagree* and *strongly disagree*, and then calculating the percentage of agree, disagree, and uncertain responses. The criteria for consensus is largely dependent upon the type of data being collected and the researcher's discretion (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). This researcher established that statistical consensus for each statement occurred if 80% or more participants selected the same rating of *agree*, *uncertain*, or *disagree*. Using this criterion, of the 95 survey statements in round one, 66 reached statistical consensus of agreement. Of the 47 statements regarding qualities of an assessment disposition, 26 reached statistical consensus of agreement, and of the 48 statements regarding ways student-affairs professionals could develop an assessment disposition, 40 reached statistical consensus of agreement among the panelists.

### **Delphi Survey Round-Two**

Invitations to participate in the second Delphi round were sent via email to the 28 individuals who completed the first survey and who provided contact information, an indication of their interest in continuing with the study. The one person who completed the survey but who did not provide identifying information in the survey was emailed by the researcher to clarify whether the contact information question had just been missed or if the panelist did not wish to continue with the study. The researcher did not receive a response from this participant, and, therefore, they were no longer included in the study. Of the 28 individuals who were invited to participate in the second survey, 24 started the survey, but only 20 participants completed it. These 20 individuals were invited to participate in the third Delphi round.

The survey for Delphi round-two (Appendix J) included 29 statements that did not reach a level of statistical consensus during round one. Of the 29 statements, 21 were about the qualities of an assessment disposition and 8 were regarding the ways student-affairs professionals could develop a disposition. A reminder of the informed consent was included on the first page of the survey. Questions were kept in the same blocks as in round one. In addition to the 29 statements, two new statements were added as variations of two original statements, based on comments from participants during the first round. Both the original statement and its variation were included for participants to consider, rate their opinions, and make comments. For each question block, statistical data from the first-round survey were provided in the form of percentages of *agree* (*strongly agree* and *agree* combined), *uncertain*, and *disagree* (*strongly disagree* and *disagree* combined) as well as participant comments regarding statements included in the second-round survey. As with the original Delphi survey, participants could rate their opinion on a 5-point Likert-type scale (*strongly agree*, *agree*, *uncertain*, *disagree*, and *strongly disagree*) and provide comments about statements in each question block. Participants were also given the opportunity to provide additional comments at the end of the survey that they believed the panel should consider for the next survey or any general comments they had about the qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition and the ways to develop this disposition. Prior to distribution, the survey was reviewed by a person in a student-affairs assessment coordinator role who was not one of the research participants. Edits were made based on feedback from the reviewer.

An email invitation (Appendix I), including the survey link, was sent on July 11, 2016, to the 28 participants from the first survey round who provided their name and email address. A

reminder email was sent on July 14, 2016, and a final reminder was sent on July 18, 2016. The survey was closed on July 22, 2016.

Analysis for the second survey round was completed in two steps. First, consensus was calculated using the same criteria used after the first round with a benchmark level of 80%. Of the 23 statements regarding qualities of an assessment disposition, nine reached statistical consensus of agreement, including the two new statements that were presented as variation of two original statements. The remaining 14 statements did not reach consensus and were included in the third survey round. Of the eight statements regarding ways to develop an assessment disposition, three of them reached a statistical level of consensus of agreement, and the remaining five statements were included in the third-round survey.

A stability test was also conducted for items that did not reach consensus after round two. Responses for each remaining statement from rounds one and two were compared for each of the 20 participants. Individual stability was determined if a participant's answers in round one were the same as those in round two (*agree/strongly agree, uncertain, or disagree/strongly disagree*). If stability of responses was indicated for three or more participants (15%), stability would be determined for that item and it would not be included in the next survey iteration. None of the survey items in round two reached this level of stability.

### **Delphi Survey Round-Three**

Of the 20 participants in survey-round two, 18 completed the third survey. Questions at the end of the survey asked participants to provide their name, position title, institution, and location of their institution. The identifying information for the 18 individuals who participated in all three survey rounds is in Appendix M. While this final group represents only 62% of the

initial panelists, the distribution of demographic data for this group is like the original set of panelists. The institutional characteristics of the 18 final panelists are depicted in Table 5 below.

Table 5

*Institutional Characteristics of Panelists Who Participated in All Delphi Rounds*

		Participants	Percentage
Type of Institution	Public, 4-year	14	77.78%
	Private, 4-year	4	22.22%
Size of Institution	Large	15	77.78%
	Medium	2	11.11%
	Small	1	5.56%
Region of United States where Institution is Located	Midwest	6	33.33%
	Northeast	1	5.56%
	Southeast	4	22.22%
	West	4	22.22%
	Southwest	3	16.67%

The third-round survey included 22 statements in which participants were asked to indicate whether they *strongly agree*, *agree*, are *uncertain*, *disagree*, or *strongly disagree* with each statement: 15 statements regarding disposition qualities and seven regarding ways to develop a student affairs assessment disposition. Statistical data and comments from survey rounds one and two were also provided for the participants' consideration prior to each block of questions. Of the statements regarding disposition qualities, 14 statements were the same as those that had not reached consensus in round two and one statement was offered as an alternate statement based on feedback from comments made by some participants in the previous two survey iterations. As with the previous surveys the opportunity was presented for participants to make comments regarding statements in each question block and to offer any general or final comments. This third-round survey also included questions regarding the participant's name, title, institution, and institution location.

The third Delphi survey was sent via an email invitation to participants on August 16, 2016. Reminder emails were sent to those who had not yet completed the survey on August 25 and 31, and on September 5, 2016. The survey was closed on September 6, 2016.

As with the previous two rounds, data analysis started with calculating percentages of agreement (*agree/strongly agree*), uncertainty (*uncertain*), and disagreement (*disagree/strongly disagree*). Of the 16 statements regarding assessment disposition qualities, consensus of agreement (80% or higher) was reached for eight statements. Consensus was not reached for the remaining eight statements. Additionally, of the six statements presented in round three relating to ways to develop an assessment disposition, three reached consensus of agreement and the remaining three statements did not reach a statistical level of consensus.

A test for stability was also conducted comparing each participant's responses in round two with responses in round three. For the 10 statements that did not reach consensus in round three, none of them met the 15% level of stability from round two to round three. Although there were still items that did not reach consensus and did not reach stability, the researcher decided that due to participant attrition, the study was terminated after round three.

### **Chapter Summary**

This study followed a Delphi research process to seek consensus about the characteristics that depict an assessment disposition for student-affairs professionals and ways in which these qualities could be developed. The opinions of experts in student-affairs assessment coordinator roles were solicited to answer the research questions. The experts' observations and expertise were surveyed in three iterations of individual data collection with summarized responses sent to participants after each round. Of the 98 statements, 95 original and three based on participant feedback, 88 reached a statistical level of consensus, established as 80% by the researcher.

## **CHAPTER 4. RESULTS**

This Delphi study was conducted to explore assessment disposition as it relates to the integration of assessment into the daily work of student-affairs professionals delivering programs and services to support student learning and success. As discussed in Chapter 3, individual interviews were first conducted with four student-affairs assessment experts and the data collected from the interviews was used to develop the initial Delphi survey. Three iterations of the survey that focused on the qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition and ways this disposition could be developed were conducted with a broader panel of student-affairs assessment experts. Each iteration after the first included summarized data and comments from the previous survey for panelists to consider when responding.

The purpose of this chapter is to discuss the results of the study as they relate to the two research questions:

1. What are the defining qualities of student-affairs professionals who demonstrate an assessment disposition?
2. How can student-affairs professionals develop an assessment disposition?

This discussion is organized into three sections. First, the results of individual interviews with four student-affairs experts are discussed, as the data obtained from these interviews served as the foundation for creating the Delphi survey. The second and third sections focus on the results for each of the two research questions. The chapter concludes with an overall summary of the study and results.

### **Findings of the Individual Interviews**

The first step of data collection in this study was to interview a small sample of experts regarding opinions about what they believed to be the qualities of a student-affairs professional



with an assessment disposition and ways this disposition could be developed. Four individuals were interviewed whose current or past positions included coordinating assessment and working with professionals in student affairs to conduct assessment. The questions about the qualities of an assessment disposition centered on constructs that make up the definition of disposition as found in the literature: beliefs, values, and attitudes. Each interview took about one-hour, the interviews were transcribed, and participants received a summary of the interview as a means for checking accuracy and ensuring meanings were correctly captured. Once each interviewee agreed that their summary was accurate, the data was analyzed using qualitative coding methods to extract statements to be used in the Delphi survey.

### **Qualities of an Assessment Disposition**

Each interviewee was initially asked an overarching question regarding how they would describe a student-affairs professional who has an assessment disposition. This question was followed with asking the experts to specifically describe the values, beliefs, and attitudes they have observed in those they perceived to have an assessment disposition. Once analyzed, the data collected were summarized into three categories that describe qualities regarding an assessment disposition. First, certain personal and professional qualities of student-affairs professionals tend to impact whether they are more likely to engage in assessment work. Second, how student-affairs professionals perceive assessment makes a difference in their integration of assessment into their work. Finally, engagement and integration of assessment is influenced by how student-affairs professionals approach assessment work. Within each of these categories, interviewees identified a variety of qualities which were later formed into individual statements and used in the Delphi survey.

**Personal and professional qualities.** Based on the opinions from the four interviewed experts, there are basic qualities student-affairs professionals bring to their work that can precipitate an integration of assessment. Curiosity and inquisitiveness were two traits identified and discussed emphatically. One expert indicated that student-affairs professionals who have a sense of curiosity and some basic knowledge about assessment are likely to formulate questions about their work and seek to answer them. Another expert described professionals who are curious as wanting to learn about the field of student affairs as well as about how to assess student learning.

Student-affairs professionals who have an assessment disposition were also described as having a propensity toward self-improvement. They utilize assessment as a means of learning about themselves, and when it comes to their work, they are not afraid of learning what is and is not working. They are critical of their performance and always want to make improvements where they can. They seem to have a growth-mindset, believing they can learn and grow and that assessment is a tool to help them with this endeavor.

Two of the interviewees described student-affairs professionals who have an assessment disposition as being collaborative. For some, this could mean engaging in data collection efforts together, but for other student-affairs professionals the collaborative approach comes from seeing themselves as contributors to student learning. Per the panelists, student-affairs professionals who are collaborative will likely develop relationships across campus, believing in a shared mission and value for student learning. Using assessment to improve student learning, therefore, becomes a collaborative effort. As one expert stated, “assessment without being shared is not really a good endeavor for anyone.”

**Perceptions about assessment.** The second category of assessment disposition qualities that emerged from the interviews is the perception student-affairs professionals have about assessment. First and foremost, the experts identified that the purpose and value individuals place on assessment plays a significant role in whether they effectively engage in it. One expert stated that student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition simply, “think it is important.” Further, they value assessment for what it can do—lead to improvement, help with decision-making, and in some cases, help in obtaining resources. Another expert pointed that when student-affairs professionals believe assessment is done only for accreditation purposes or to “prove our worth” they are less likely to do it.

The experts also identified that associating assessment with student learning is a key for student-affairs professionals who incorporate assessment into their work. They value their role as an educator and believe in the “seamlessness in education.” One expert explained that an assessment disposition is demonstrated in the value student-affairs professionals place on this seamless approach to education. They value the idea that learning takes place both in and outside the classroom and there is a role for people in all arenas of higher education to be contributing to student learning.

Finally, the interviewees proposed that student-affairs professionals who believe that assessment is an integral part of student-affairs practice, are also more likely to engage in assessment work. This view is closely connected to the belief that student-affairs work impacts student learning. Therefore, student-affairs work goes beyond simply providing basic services and information. Additionally, assessment is becoming more imbedded in student-affairs literature and in the expectations of external entities such as higher education accreditors and the federal government who are increasingly expecting a return on investment from all areas of

higher education. One expert stated that, soon, skills and knowledge will not be enough, so assessment disposition will be critical for the future success of the field of student affairs.

**Approach to assessment.** The third category regarding the qualities of an assessment disposition relate to how student-affairs professionals approach assessment. This begins by simply having a positive attitude towards it. One expert stated, “I would rather have people with no skill and have a positive attitude, than a whole staff with a high level of skill, but not a positive attitude [towards assessment].” The experts identified that many of these professionals see assessment as an integral part of their job responsibilities and are intrinsically motivated to do it. Others may not be intrinsically motivated, but rather, they value what assessment can do for them and what it can contribute to the success of their programs.

Second, the experts identified that for student-affairs professionals to have an assessment disposition they need to have some level of confidence that they can do assessment. Feeling empowered to do assessment and developing even a small amount of confidence in their abilities can help diminish the fear often associated with assessment, hence, helping student-affairs professionals feel more comfortable engaging in it. For example, one expert pointed out the following:

A lot of assessment gets tied to people’s math ability. You don’t have to be a math person; you have to be curious enough to ask the questions. You can partner-up with someone who is the math person. The math person may not be a good questioner.

Student-affairs professionals are likely to have an assessment disposition when they believe that results will not be used against them. Confidence is associated with the belief that assessment results are not a reflection of the person and should not be taken personally, nor should someone

be penalized for assessment results. Again, removing the fear of assessment opens the door for student-affairs professionals to build their confidence, and therefore, more freely engage in it.

Finally, whether and how student-affairs professionals engage in assessment can contribute towards an assessment disposition. Some are already reflective learners and use assessment as a tool for consideration of their work and the development of new understandings about their impact. Others may want to learn more about assessment by jumping in and doing it. One expert identified these professionals as “risk takers”—they are willing to set aside the idea that they may not know how to do assessment, but they take a risk and do it anyway.

Engagement can also come when they believe that assessment should be well thought-out, but they also believe it does not need to be overly complex.

### **Development of an Assessment Disposition**

The second part of each expert interview focused on questions regarding how student-affairs professionals could develop an assessment disposition. Qualitative coding of this data produced five categories with various concepts falling into each one: (1) engagement; (2) work environment; (3) success with assessment; (4) training and development; and (5) student learning. The paragraphs that follow explain these categories further.

**Engagement.** First, assessment disposition can be developed when student-affairs professionals have the opportunity to engage in assessment work. One expert explained that when student-affairs professionals move away from the idea that they are doing assessment to appease external expectations or mandates and, instead, engage in projects that are meaningful and valuable to them they are likely to develop an assessment disposition. On the other hand, another expert explained that engaging in assessment for accreditation purposes is still engaging

in good assessment practice, and, for some, it could be a gateway to wanting to better understand the effects of their work and continuing their assessment practice.

Another expert pointed out that some student-affairs professionals are already engaged in assessment, often informally, but do not realize that is what they are doing. When they realize that they are already engaging in some form of assessment by collecting data and using it to make decisions they may also begin to realize that assessment does not need to be difficult. Thus, their attitude towards it will become more positive and they are more likely to embed assessment into their regular professional practice.

**Work environment.** When the institutional infrastructure supports assessment practice and integrates it into regular meetings and processes such as annual reports, strategic planning, and reward systems, student-affairs professionals are likely to associate assessment as an integral part of the institution and develop more positive beliefs, values and attitudes towards assessment. This disposition can also be strengthened when student-affairs professionals feel encouraged and supported to engage in assessment activity and when assessment work is expected for purposes beyond accountability. As one interviewee stated, “it doesn’t mean everyone is going to love assessment, but the *opportunity* [emphasis added] to love assessment should be there.” Also important is that assessment is not an “add-on” to their work responsibilities. It should explicitly be part of their work responsibilities and, if possible, student-affairs professionals should have access to help with their assessment.

**Success with assessment.** The interviewees also proposed that when student-affairs professionals experience some level of success with assessment their disposition is likely to be developed. Small successes can lead to small victories and self-satisfaction which can create the momentum necessary to continue the integration of assessment into their work. Additionally, for

some, being rewarded or recognized for assessment work itself or for the improvements in their work because of using assessment can contribute to the development of an assessment disposition. Finally, when student-affairs professionals can see how assessment relates to the success in other areas of their work or how it is integral to the success of the institution, their attitude and value for assessment is also likely to improve.

**Training and development.** The development of assessment knowledge and skills may have a reciprocal relationship with the development of an assessment disposition. In other words, while having positive attitudes, values, and beliefs about assessment may entice a person to want to learn more about it, learning more about assessment can also help build an assessment disposition. Per the experts, knowledge and skill development could take place through formal education as well as professional development activities and is enhanced when supervisors support this training. Assessment training should be congruent with each person's level of assessment experience and include concrete examples that demonstrate assessment is not overly complicated or difficult. It is also expected to be helpful when student-affairs professionals have access to assistance with their assessment work. This assistance could be in the form of personal support and encouragement or direct help such as in creating a project or in analyzing the results.

**Student learning.** In each interview with the panel of experts, a student-affairs professionals' commitment to student learning was identified as being strongly associated with an assessment disposition. The development of a student-affairs professionals' disposition toward student learning can also have a positive impact on how they develop a disposition for assessment. Gaining knowledge about how students learn and how to gather evidence that measures student outcomes can be a means for student-affairs professionals to see the value of assessment and increase their desire to engage in it. This is especially true if student learning is

already a priority in their work. On the other hand, as one expert described, student-affairs professionals who see student learning as a responsibility left for the academic affairs side of the institution are less likely to engage in assessment of student learning as well.

### **Findings of the Delphi Survey**

Interviews with the four assessment experts provided a framework to further explore the assessment disposition. Analysis of the interview data using qualitative coding methods produced statements to describe the qualities of a student-affairs professional with an assessment disposition as well as statements regarding ways an assessment disposition could be developed. The Delphi survey administered to a larger panel of assessment experts was informed by these statements, and the results are organized per the categories resulting from the individual interviews.

### **Qualities of an Assessment Disposition**

A student-affairs assessment disposition consists of the values, beliefs, and attitudes that precipitate the integration of assessment into the work of student-affairs professionals, particularly practitioners who are actively engaged in the delivery of programs and services. Analysis of the data from interviews with four student-affairs assessment experts helped to identify three categories regarding the qualities of an assessment disposition: (1) personal and professional qualities; (2) perceptions about assessment; and (3) approach to assessment. Within each of these, individual statements emerged and 46 statements were presented to participants of the Delphi study. Three additional statements were presented as variations of two original statements, making a total of 49 statements participants were asked to consider. Within the three rounds of survey iterations and summarized feedback, panelists in this study agreed at a minimum level of 80% consensus that 41 of these statements constitute the qualities of an



assessment disposition. Consensus was not reached for the remaining eight statements. The following sections describe the results of the Delphi survey for each of the three overarching categories, chronicling consensus in each survey iteration as well as those items that did not reach consensus.

**Personal and professional qualities.** Statements in this category relate to how student-affairs professionals view themselves and their work as well as their interest in working with others. During survey round-one, participants agreed that 7 of the 14 statements in this category depict the personal and professional qualities of a student-affairs professional with an assessment disposition. Table 6 summarizes the results for this category including statements that reached at least an 80% level of agreement in each round and those statements that did not reach consensus. The 29 participants in this first survey iteration agreed at a 93.10% level of consensus that these individuals value feedback and self-improvement. Participants also agreed in the first survey round that student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition believe their talents can be developed, are inquisitive learners, and are intellectually curious. In the second round, participants also agreed that an assessment disposition includes a value for innovation.

Table 6

*Statements Regarding Personal and Professional Qualities by Survey Round*

Statement	% Agree	% Uncertain	% Disagree	N
<b>Consensus in Round 1</b>				
• Value feedback	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Value self-improvement	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Believe their own talents can be developed	89.65	10.34	0.00	29
• Are interested in working with others to gain assessment knowledge and/or skills they may not already have	86.21	13.79	0.00	29
• Are inquisitive learners	86.20	13.79	0.00	29
• Value the process of learning	82.76	17.24	0.00	29
• Are intellectually curious	82.76	17.24	0.00	29
<b>Consensus in Round 2</b>				
• Value focusing on both program strengths and limitations (new question in round two)	90.00	10.00	0.00	20
• Value innovation	85.00	15.00	0.00	20
<b>Consensus in Round 3</b>				
• Are interested in building relationships to make assessment successful	94.44	5.56	0.00	18
• Value collaboration	88.89	11.11	0.00	18
• Value engagement in professional dialogues	88.89	11.11	0.00	18
• Believe that considering strengths of a program or initiative is important as well as focusing on limitations. (new question in round three)	83.33	5.56	11.12	18
<b>No Consensus</b>				
• Value working with others across the institution	77.78	16.67	5.56	18
• Value focusing on strengths rather than limitations	38.89	33.33	27.78	18

*Note.* Survey responses of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Agree*. Survey responses of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Disagree*.

While participants agreed in the first round that student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition are likely interested in working with others to “gain assessment knowledge and/or skills they may not already have”, the overall idea of collaboration was met with varying points of view. Some participants believe that collaboration is a natural and core part of effective assessment. One participant stated, “With a strong interest in collaborating for the success of their students, staff often gain assessment competencies, engage in dialogues, and work with many other staff across the institution. The driver here, I believe, is the collaborative attitude toward their work.” Another agreed, “Assessment can, and should, be a very collaborative effort including working with a variety of stakeholders and including students in the whole process.” Moreover, some participants expressed that effective assessment work does not necessarily require collaborating with others, but perhaps collaboration comes in the improvement efforts that follow. One argued that the necessity of collaboration in doing assessment...

...may not always be the case as sometimes people who like and are good at assessment are the ones who can put their heads down and get work done. That doesn't always happen in collaborations. I am inclined to think that those who are assessment focused or do it effectively are aware of big picture issues and want to improve to demonstrate contributions, so they are likely geared toward collaborations because you have to work together to get things done and make people aware; however, I think assessment as a practice can be done quite well as a single person.

In the end, consensus was reached in the third survey round regarding student-affairs professionals valuing collaboration and engagement in professional dialogues as well as being interested in building relationships to make assessment successful. Consensus was not reached, however, regarding valuing working with others across the institution.

Finally, the statement, “student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice value focusing on strengths rather than limitations,” had a 58.62% level of

agreement in round one and the rest of the panelists were uncertain about this statement. A new statement, “student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice value focusing on both program strengths and limitations,” was presented in round two and reached a 90% agreement in round two, with only 10% still uncertain about the statement. Although this alternate statement reached a 90% level of agreement in round two, some of the participant comments indicated that this statement may still not be quite right. One panelist stated, “I don’t know if the term ‘value’ is necessary.” Others emphasized a need to balance focusing on strengths and limitations. The new statement, in round three “student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice “believe that considering strengths of a program or initiative is important as well as focusing on limitations,” reached consensus among the panelists in round three (83.33%), but to a lesser degree than the new statement in round two, “student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice *value focusing on both program strengths and limitations*” (90%).

**Perceptions about assessment.** The 17 statements categorized around student-affairs professionals’ perceptions about assessment center mostly on beliefs about what assessment is and its purpose and value. Additional statements focus specifically on perceptions regarding student learning and the student affairs profession as they relate to assessment. As shown in Table 7, the first survey round 12 of the statements reached consensus of agreement among the participants. The beliefs that “assessment is for more than accreditation” and “the purpose of assessment is for the improvement of programs and/or services” reached 100 percent consensus in round one. Participants also agreed that assessment helps with decision making and in obtaining resources.

Table 7

*Statements Regarding Perceptions about Assessment by Survey Round*

Statement	% Agree	% Uncertain	% Disagree	N
<b>Consensus in Round 1</b>				
• Believe assessment is for more than accreditation	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• Believe the purpose of assessment is for improvement of programs and/or services	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• Believe assessment can help with decision making	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• Are interested in understanding the effects of programs and services	96.43	3.57	0.00	28 <sup>a</sup>
• Believe assessment helps tell the story of student affairs	93.11	6.90	0.00	29
• Believe learning takes place in and out of the classroom	93.10	3.45	3.45	29
• Believe assessment is a best practice in student affairs	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Believe student affairs work impacts student learning	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Are motivated to demonstrate the role student affairs plays in student learning	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Believe assessment is useful for obtaining resources	86.21	3.45	10.34	29
• Are interested in exploring the impact of interventions on student learning and development	86.21	10.34	3.45	29
• Believe assessment is an avenue to enhance student learning	82.76	17.24	0.00	29
<b>Consensus in Round 2</b>				
• Believe assessment is helpful in facilitating student success (new question in round two)	100.00	0.00	0.00	20

*Note.* Survey responses of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Agree*. Survey responses of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Disagree*.

<sup>a</sup>One participant did not provide a response to this statement.

Table 7. *Statements Regarding Perceptions about Assessment by Survey Round (continued)*

Statement	% Agree	% Uncertain	% Disagree	N
<b>Consensus in Round 3</b>				
• Believe assessment is critical to the success of student affairs	94.45	0.00	5.56	18
• Believe assessment is critical to facilitating student success	88.88	0.00	11.11	18
<b>No Consensus</b>				
• Value their role as an educator	72.22	22.22	5.56	18
• Are interested in learning about the student-affairs profession	44.44	38.89	16.67	18

*Note.* Survey responses of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Agree*. Survey responses of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Disagree*.

<sup>a</sup>One participant did not provide a response to this statement.

In the first round, participants reached a consensus that student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition are interested in understanding the effects of programs and services and that they are interested in exploring the impact of interventions on student learning and development. One participant stated:

While the assessment effort should help improve programs or services, the purpose is not that improvement itself but rather what that improvement leads to-- i.e., greater student learning and development. We assess to ensure that our students are gaining from the programs and services what we intend for them to gain. In that sense, assessment is an ethical obligation to demonstrate integrity and fidelity.

This statement supports the opinions regarding student learning. Participants agreed in the first round that student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition likely believe that learning takes place in and out of the classroom and, therefore, student affairs work impacts student learning. Additionally, assessment is an avenue for student-affairs professionals to enhance student learning. There was some disagreement among the panelist whether assessment is helpful or critical to student success. While these two statements were presented and both

reached consensus, 100% agreed in round two that assessment is helpful, but some disagreed that it is critical.

Interestingly, whether student-affairs professionals must see themselves as educators to incorporate assessment in their work was met with contrasting points of view. One panelist stated, “We are all educators whether we directly serve students. We help create the educational environment of the institution.” Another agreed, “We are educators. Educators assess. We should always be seeking more knowledge about the thing we're assessing. And once again, even if we only deliver services/manage facilities, we're all educators and part of creating the educational environment of the institution.” However, another panelist presented an opposite perspective, stating, “Some departments aren't about student learning, but they are critical to student affairs. Not at all assessment is about student learning.” A participant in round three followed the same line of thinking by stating, “Some professionals don't consider themselves to be educators, but I'll land in the middle because they still might value assessment.” The statement that student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition, “value their role as an educator” did not reach consensus after three survey rounds.

Participants reached consensus in the first round that assessment helps tell the story of student affairs and it is a best practice in student affairs. They also agreed that student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition are motivated to demonstrate the role student affairs plays in student learning. There was some disagreement that assessment is *critical* to the success of student affairs, but in the final round consensus was reached for this statement. The statement that did not reach consensus was whether student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition must be interested in learning about the student-affairs profession. Based on

panelists' comments, this may be a quality of a good student-affairs professional, but is perhaps not necessarily directly attributed to the assessment disposition.

**Approach to assessment.** How student-affairs professionals approach assessment is the third category defining the qualities of an assessment disposition. Results for this category are depicted in Table 8. This category includes 18 statements in which participants varied the most in their opinions and none of the statements presented reached 100% consensus in any of the survey rounds. Consensus was reached in the first round for seven statements with a range of agreement between 96.55% and 82.76%. Participants agreed at the highest levels that student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition are likely to have a positive attitude toward assessment and want to do a good job with it. Additionally, they are committed to asking questions about the effectiveness of their work. Although the statement, “see assessment as an integral part of their job responsibilities” reached consensus in the first survey round at 82.76% agreement, it is worth noting that two of the 29 participants (6.90%) expressed disagreement with this statement.



Table 8

*Statements Regarding Approach to Assessment by Survey Round*

Statement	% Agree	% Uncertain	% Disagree	N
<b>Consensus in Round 1</b>				
• Have a positive attitude toward assessment	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• Are committed to asking questions about the effectiveness of their work	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Want to do a good job with assessment	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Are willing to put resources towards assessment	89.66	10.34	0.00	29
• Believe assessment is worth their time	89.65	10.34	0.00	29
• Value reflective practice	86.20	13.79	0.00	29
• See assessment as an integral part of their job responsibilities	82.76	10.34	6.90	29
<b>Consensus in Round 2</b>				
• Feel empowered to do assessment	90.00	10.00	0.00	20
• Feel competent enough to do assessment	90.00	5.00	5.00	20
• Believe in the importance of the assessment cycle	90.00	5.00	5.00	20
• Believe assessment must be well thought-out, but not overly complex	90.00	5.00	5.00	20
• Are open to assessment regardless of the results	80.00	10.00	10.00	20
• Want to learn more about assessment by doing assessment	80.00	10.00	10.00	20
<b>Consensus in Round 3</b>				
• Believe assessment results will not be used against them	88.89	5.56	5.56	18
<b>No Consensus</b>				
• Are intrinsically motivated to do assessment	77.78	5.56	16.67	18
• Do not take assessment results personally	61.11	16.67	22.22	18
• Enjoy doing assessment	50.00	27.78	22.22	18
• Believe that theory should be incorporated into assessment	44.45	11.11	44.44	18

*Note.* Survey responses of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Agree*. Survey responses of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Disagree*.

Participants commented on several of the statements that did not reach consensus in round one. The most discussed topics were those that did not reach consensus at all and in which there was the most disagreement expressed in the entire survey. These statements are regarding intrinsic motivation, taking assessment results personally, enjoying assessment, and whether theory should be incorporated into assessment.

Consensus was not met after three survey rounds among the panelists regarding motivation for integrating assessment into practice, nor whether it is necessary to enjoy assessment to effectively incorporate assessment into their work. Participants' comments regarding whether student-affairs professionals should be intrinsically motivated or enjoy assessment depict various points of view. One panelist believes that it is, "curiosity [that] drives the need to assess. What they enjoy is the result of the assessment process, and in some cases the creativity of developing an instrument which gives them good information." Another stated, "Staff can effectively incorporate assessment into practice without enjoying assessment or feeling an intrinsic motivation to do it. Their assessment can still be effective; they just don't enjoy it and will never do it without it being a requirement or being 'incentivized'." One panelist who has served as a coach to student-affairs professionals found, "those who are intrinsically motivated are more likely to come to me for help, integrate it into their work, and seek out opportunities to learn more. I cannot say for certain that they enjoy it." It seems that there needs to be some motivation to do assessment, however, the lack of consensus indicates uncertainty in what that motivator is and that, perhaps, there are different motivators for each person.

Panelists also presented much discussion regarding whether student-affairs professionals who integrate assessment into their work are likely to take the results personally and whether taking results personally is motivating or demotivating. One panelists stated that they believe

student-affairs professionals, because of their quality of being empathetic, will “always” take their work personally. Whereas, another panelist believes that for student-affairs professionals to effectively use assessment for improvement they cannot take the results personally. Finally, one person suggested that,

Believing assessment results will not be used against them and feeling empowered to do assessment are both functions of campus and assessment leadership creating a safe environment in which staff can conduct assessment. Creating that safe environment is critical to folks effectively integrating assessment, because without doing so they are more likely to not participate, intentionally/unintentionally place the emphasize on only positive results, and/or willing to be open to failure.

It seems from these varying points of view that it may be healthy if student-affairs professionals take ownership for making improvements based on assessment results, but not healthy if assessment results are used to reflect the value of a student-affairs professional and their work.

The idea that student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition must believe that theory should be incorporated into assessment received the highest level of disagreement (44.55%) among the panelists in round three. The opinion expressed by one panelist in the second survey round indicated, “The assessment professional probably cares about this; in my experience, the average student affairs professional, even one who willingly collaborates and is intrinsically motivated, does not care about theory, the cycle or the ‘well-thoughtoutness’ of assessment. They care about meaningful data that illuminates a problem in the student outcomes or which lets them improve their programs & services.” In response, another panelist responded with the following statement in round three:

While I understand the participant's comment from the previous survey that the "average student affairs professional... does not care about theory of assessment," I do think integration of theory into assessment is very important. For example, I consistently run into staff that want to be able to better communicate/assess the impact of their programs and services. However, they often make this harder than

it needs to be by trying to duplicate information that's already confirmed through research.

In the end, there was an even split among the panelists in survey there between those that believe student-affairs professionals should incorporate theory into assessment and those who either believe it is not necessary or simply believe it will not happen.

### **Summary of Results for Research Question One**

The first research question in this study asks, “What are the defining qualities of student-affairs professionals who demonstrate an assessment disposition?” In other words, what are the attitudes, values, and beliefs of student-affairs professionals that make it more likely they will engage in assessment and utilize it in their daily work? An examination of the results of this study points toward three areas of influence. The first area is regarding who they are as people, specifically how they view themselves and their work. Based on this study, those who, in an essence, are more growth-minded are likely to engage in assessment. These are individuals who are interested in personal growth and learning. They are also curious, inquisitive, and want to know information, even if the information is not always positive. Additionally, they tend to value collaborating with others, particularly around assessment. For some, this collaboration may be in the work of conducting assessment, and for others it may be in working with others to utilize assessment results.

The second set of attitudes, values, and beliefs depicting an assessment disposition that emerged from this study relate to how student-affairs professionals perceive assessment. Based on these results, while external influences such as accreditation may move student-affairs professionals to engage in assessment, they are more likely to engage in it because they see assessment as a tool they can and should use

to improve their work. Additionally, these student-affairs professionals can see a link between assessment and its contributions to student learning and success. They value assessment for these reasons and believe it is a core part of the student-affairs profession and, therefore, their practice.

Finally, how student-affairs professionals approach assessment can influence their engagement in assessment. As with most things, the results of this study supported that having a positive attitude about assessment highly influences whether student-affairs professionals will engage in it. Those who are committed to doing assessment believe that asking questions about their work is important and that assessment is simply part of their work responsibilities. They also have a sense of comfort with the idea of assessment, believing they can do it and are willing to engage in assessment even if they are not experts. When student-affairs professionals do not over-complicate the idea of assessment they are also more likely to engage in it. While assessment may not be the most enjoyable part of their work, student-affairs professionals with an assessment disposition believe in it enough to do it anyway.

### **A Note about the Non-Collective Nature of These Results**

Prior to ending this section, it is important to note an observation that was offered by some survey participants. While many of the statements regarding the qualities describing a student-affairs professional with an assessment disposition met a statistical level of consensus of agreement, it is not necessary that student-affairs professionals possess all these qualities to have an assessment disposition. One participant stated,

On this set of dispositions, I agree but not strongly. I have known staff over the years who effectively integrate assessment into their practice and demonstrate these dispositions in widely varying levels. Maybe they believe their talents can be developed, but their focus is on developing the talents of their students. Yes,

they do focus on strengths, but they also attend to limitations; their focus is a balance of strengths and limitations where more attention goes to strengths while also being mindful of limits. In general, they do exhibit at least some inquisitiveness and curiosity, but I have not found them to exhibit these qualities at levels that an assessment professional or research faculty member might. It certainly varies across individuals.

Further, it is not necessary that all the conditions presented as ways to develop an assessment disposition exist for a student-affairs professional to develop an assessment disposition. Some student-affairs professionals will respond positively to certain circumstances, while others will be influenced by different circumstances. Nonetheless, as describe in the next section, the results of this survey indicate that there are many ways an assessment disposition could be developed.

### **Development of a Student-Affairs Assessment Disposition**

The second research question in this study focuses on the various ways an assessment disposition could be developed. Seeking to answer this second research question, expert panelists were presented with 48 statements regarding conditions or situations in which student-affairs professionals may be more likely to develop an assessment disposition. These statements were based on data obtained from individual interviews with the initial panel of four student-affairs assessment experts. Of these 48 statements, 40 reached an 80% or higher level of agreement in the first round with 14 statements at 100% agreement among the panelists. Only three statements did not reach consensus. This discussion of the survey results is organized around the five categories that emerged from the expert interviews.

**Engagement.** Based on the opinions of the panelists in this study, engagement in assessment at some level is likely to help in the development of an assessment disposition. The survey results for statements related to engagement are show in Table 9. All 29 participants in the first-round survey agreed that engaging in assessment work that is meaningful and valuable as well as having relationships with others who have an assessment disposition, especially

mentors who can model it, are ways student-affairs professionals can develop their own assessment disposition. Having various opportunities to talk about assessment, see others engaged in assessment, and do assessment themselves can all have positive effects on this development.

Table 9  
*Statements Regarding Engagement by Survey Round*

Statement	% Agree	% Uncertain	% Disagree	N
<b>Consensus in Round 1</b>				
• They engage in assessment work that is meaningful to them	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They engage in assessment work that is valuable to them	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They have mentors who model an assessment disposition	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They build relationships with others who have an assessment disposition	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They see others using assessment meaningfully	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• They have opportunities to engage in assessment	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Their assessment work involves more than just gathering data	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• They engage frequently in conversations about assessment	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• They are around others who have an assessment disposition	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Assessment is embedded into their practice	89.65	10.34	0.00	29
<b>Consensus in Round 3</b>				
• They are involved in professional associations that foster a broader perspective about assessment	94.44	0.00	5.56	18
<b>No Consensus</b>				
• They are placed in assessment work groups	61.11	33.33	5.56	18

*Note.* Survey responses of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Agree*. Survey responses of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Disagree*.

Consensus regarding whether involvement in professional associations that foster a broader perspective about assessment facilitates the development of assessment disposition was not reached until round three, with one person still in disagreement. One participant in favor of this statement pointed out:

For professional association involvement, even if one chooses a section or special-interest-group that is not explicitly assessment focused, if the association structures its professional development (PD) well, those PD opportunities will integrate assessment ideas into the discussion. The association will also incorporate assessment into the opportunity itself will go beyond merely taking a satisfaction survey or indirect learning outcomes assessment at the end.

Finally, placing student-affairs professionals into work groups was a good way to develop an assessment disposition among some panelists, but there was not enough agreement to reach a statistical level of consensus. One participant described disagreement with placing individuals into assessment work groups with the following metaphor:

I am quite skeptical of attempting to cultivate an assessment disposition by placing a professional into an assessment work group when their interests are not there. That would probably work about as well as trying to cultivate in me an interest in university relations by placing me on a university relations work group {shudder}. I would serve to the best of my ability because of a sense of integrity, but as soon as I rotate off of that work group, I'm done. I might be more mindful of implications for university relations, but I am not going to feel greater disposition to do that work.

The overall comments from panelists indicate that while working in a group may have benefits, being forced or expected to work with others on assessment may not necessarily be motivating for some, and therefore, would not assist in the development of an assessment disposition.

**Work Environment.** The most statements regarding the development of an assessment disposition fall into the work environment category. As shown in Table 10, only one of the 17 statements in this category did not reach consensus, and seven statements were at 100% consensus in round one. This conclusion supports the professional literature purporting the



importance of an assessment culture. Based on this data, a work environment that supports the development of assessment disposition should include discussions about assessment at meetings; integration of assessment into regular processes such as annual reports and strategic plans; recognition for assessment work; along with general support and encouragement to engage in assessment. Creating an institutional infrastructure that supports assessment practice might also include assessment as part of position responsibilities instead of something that is “added on” later. Providing access to help with assessment can also precipitate a student-affairs professional’s disposition for assessment. Such environment might also include or lead to personnel to see that assessment is not overly complicated and that some of the work they are already doing is a form of assessment. There was disagreement from one person in round one as to whether expecting staff to engage in assessment for reasons beyond accreditation is important to developing assessment dispositions. Additionally, one person disagreed that a student-affairs professionals’ need to demonstrate the value of their work to others is important in the development of an assessment disposition.

Table 10

*Statements Regarding Work Environment by Survey Round*

Statement	% Agree	% Uncertain	% Disagree	N
<b>Consensus in Round 1</b>				
• They see examples of assessment that demonstrate it is not overly complicated and/or difficult	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They recognize they are already doing assessment, even if it's less formal	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They can see concrete examples of assessment projects	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• Discussion about assessment is incorporated into meetings	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They feel supported to engage in assessment	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They are encouraged to engage in assessment	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They are recognized for their assessment work	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They have access to help with their assessment	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• Their institutional infrastructure supports assessment practice	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• They are rewarded for doing assessment	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• Assessment is not simply an “add-on” to their work responsibilities	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• Assessment is integrated into processes (e.g., annual reports, strategic planning)	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Assessment work is expected for more than accountability	89.65	6.90	3.45	29
• They feel a need to demonstrate the value of their work to others	86.21	10.34	3.45	29

*Note.* Survey responses of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Agree*. Survey responses of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Disagree*.

Table 10. *Statements Regarding Work Environment by Survey Round (continued)*

Statement	% Agree	% Uncertain	% Disagree	N
Consensus in Round 2				
• They have high levels of accountability	85.00	10.00	5.00	20
• Assessment is part of their performance reviews	80.00	20.00	0.00	20
No Consensus				
• They are expected to meet accreditation standards	27.78	16.67	55.56	18

*Note.* Survey responses of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Agree*. Survey responses of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Disagree*.

Most discussion in this category among the panelists was in relation to external motivators in the work environment and whether they are helpful in developing professionals with an assessment disposition. These include evaluating assessment work in performance reviews, having high levels of accountability in their work and expecting student-affairs personnel to meet accreditation standards.

Although panelists reached consensus of agreement in the second survey round regarding the inclusion assessment work as part of performance reviews and placing high levels of accountability on student-affairs professionals to develop assessment disposition, opinions of dissent are worth noting. One participant stated, “High levels of accountability doesn't always make someone interested in assessment or developing assessment skills. It can be counterproductive to encouraging their curiosity and critical thinking.” Another panelist agreed that addressing assessment in performance reviews is reasonable and even motivating, but having high levels of accountability and expectations to meet accreditation standards seems a bit too “punitive” and could “inhibit good assessment.”

Having expectations that student-affairs professionals meet accreditation standards did not reach consensus, and in the third round 55% of participants disagreed with this statement. This may be because many student affairs units do not have official accreditation standards. One panelist pointed out, however, that units that have program-level accreditation, such as counseling services, may develop an assessment disposition by engaging in it as a means for meeting accreditation standards.

**Success with assessment.** Experiencing success with assessment is another area where disposition can be developed. As depicted in Table 11, panelists were presented with seven statements to consider. Of these, five statements reached consensus of agreement in the first survey round, with all participants agreeing that assessment projects should be clearly aligned with an individual's work.

Table 11

*Statements Regarding Success with Assessment by Survey Round*

Statement	% Agree	% Uncertain	% Disagree	N
Consensus in Round 1				
• Assessment projects are clearly aligned with other parts of their work	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They utilize assessment to demonstrate the value of their work	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• Assessment is a tool that helps them obtain resources	93.11	6.90	0.00	29
• They experience self-satisfaction from their assessment work	93.10	3.45	3.45	29
• They experience small victories around assessment	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
Consensus in Round 2				
• Assessment work is fun for them	90.00	5.00	5.00	20
Consensus in Round 3				
• They associate assessment as an integral part of the institution	88.89	0.00	11.11	18

*Note.* Survey responses of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Agree*. Survey responses of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Disagree*.

While consensus of agreement was reached in the second round that an assessment disposition may be more likely developed when assessment is fun, one participant questioned where the “fun” comes into play. They proposed that perhaps it is not necessarily that doing assessment is fun, but rather what a student-affairs professional can do to serve their students better is what is fun.

Most discussion in this category centered around whether associating assessment as an integral part of the institution also precipitates assessment disposition. One panelist stated, “I continue to believe that an institution that illustrates the integral nature of assessment (through evidence-based decision-making, allocation of resources, celebration of assessment, etc.) will

foster the development of an assessment disposition in student affairs professionals.” On the other hand, another panelist argued, “Anything integral to the institution might not earn a favorable sentiment. Rather than associating assessment as integral to the institution, professionals who effectively develop an assessment disposition associate assessment as integral to the program or service that they themselves provide to students.” Ultimately this statement did reach consensus.

**Training and development.** When a student-affairs professional has an opportunity to increase their assessment knowledge and skills it may be reasonable to believe that it is likely they will develop a stronger assessment disposition as well. The statements and results regarding training and development are shown in Table 12. The participants in the Delphi survey reached consensus in round one that all seven of the statements about training and development would help in the development of an assessment disposition. All participants agreed that disposition is increased when student-affairs professionals have developed assessment skills and when assessment training is part of their professional development. Increasing knowledge about assessment and even learning simple assessment techniques reached consensus among the panelist. One participant of the 29 disagreed that having assessment training in their formal education is necessary to the development of the assessment disposition.

Table 12

*Statements Regarding Training and Development by Survey Round*

Statement	% Agree	% Uncertain	% Disagree	N
<b>Consensus in Round 1</b>				
• Assessment training is part of their professional development	100.00	0.00	0.00	29
• They have developed assessment skills	100.00	0.00	0.00	28 <sup>b</sup>
• Their supervisor supports opportunities for assessment training	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• Assessment training is congruent with their level of assessment experience	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• They have increased their assessment knowledge	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• They have learned simple assessment techniques	92.85	7.14	0.00	28 <sup>b</sup>
• Assessment training is part of their formal education	89.66	6.90	3.45	29

*Note.* Survey responses of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Agree*. Survey responses of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Disagree*.

<sup>b</sup>One participant did not provide a response to this statement.

One participant’s comment also brought up the “chicken or egg” question regarding which comes first, knowledge and skills about assessment or assessment disposition. They stated:

Developing the competence to do assessment through these methods is a vital part to aiding the assessment disposition of student affairs staff. I agree that these tactics can make that happen, but am not convinced that all of this put together will necessarily result in enhanced disposition. It's actually likely that those who engage in these types of activities may have already been disposed so enhancing their disposition will likely not be an outcome.

Another participant pointed out that development of knowledge and skills will not support the development of an assessment disposition unless student-affairs professionals are supported in also applying them to assessment work.

**Student learning.** Earlier results in this study indicated that student-affairs professionals who have an assessment disposition are likely to believe that assessment provides a means to improve student learning. It is not surprising, then, that four out of the five statements about conditions that precipitated an assessment disposition reached consensus of agreement in the first rounds of the survey. As shown in Table 13, participants agreed that when student-affairs professionals can see how assessment helps students and when they know how to assess student learning, it is likely their assessment disposition will be enhanced. Additionally, it is helpful when they make student learning a priority in their work.

Table 13

*Statements Regarding Student Learning by Survey Round*

Statement	% Agree	% Uncertain	% Disagree	N
<b>Consensus in Round 1</b>				
• They associate assessment with helping students succeed	96.55	3.45	0.00	29
• They can see how assessment helps students	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• They know how to gather evidence to measure student outcomes	93.10	6.90	0.00	29
• Student learning is a priority in their work	82.76	10.34	6.90	29
<b>No Consensus</b>				
• They have training on how students learn	55.55	27.78	16.67	18

*Note.* Survey responses of *Agree* and *Strongly Agree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Agree*. Survey responses of *Disagree* and *Strongly Disagree* have been combined and are depicted as % *Disagree*.

The level in which student-affairs professionals are directly responsible for student learning, and therefore, should be trained on how students learn as a means of developing an assessment disposition did not find consensus among the panelists in this study. Specifically,



panelists disagreed on the degree to which student learning directly relates to student-affairs work and, therefore, to student-affairs assessment.

### **Summary of Results for Research Question Two**

Based on the results of this study, there are many ways a student-affairs assessment disposition could be developed. These include activities that improve assessment disposition as well as environmental conditions that support this development. When student-affairs professionals engage in assessment in some way, whether they are skilled at it or not, it can help them develop their assessment disposition. This engagement might include talking with others about assessment, seeing what others are doing with assessment, or engaging in assessment practice themselves.

Once student-affairs professionals engage in assessment at some level, seeing or experiencing the benefits or having success with assessment, it can influence them to continue doing it. The results of this study indicate that one of the most effective ways for student-affairs professionals to experience the benefits or success from assessment is when the projects in which they engage are clearly aligned with the rest of their work. For student-affairs professionals who are engaged in delivering programs and services for students, assessment needs to be closely related to this work. When assessment is otherwise associated with a purpose or outcomes that are beyond their daily work, it is less likely student-affairs professionals will develop positive or motivating attitudes, beliefs, and values about assessment.

Engagement with assessment and the development of an assessment disposition are enhanced when student-affairs professionals can build their knowledge and skills through training and development. This training and development could be obtained through formal education, such as a graduate school program, or it could be obtained through professional

development opportunities. Nonetheless, to be effective, assessment training and development should be congruent with their current level of assessment experience.

The cultural conditions in which a student-affairs professional works can also influence the development of an assessment disposition. This includes the work environment as well as the degree to which student learning is important in their work. First, a work environment that encourages and support assessment work is important. When assessment is integrated into regular work activities such as meetings and processes as well as include in position descriptions, with time dedicated toward assessment, it becomes a natural part of what student-affairs professionals do. Holding staff accountable for doing assessment and addressing their assessment work in responsibility reviews can also positively impact their assessment disposition. It is when assessment, especially assessment results, are held against employees and becomes punitive that positive assessment dispositions can diminish. Finally, when student learning is valued or seen as part of student-affairs work, student-affairs professionals are likely to also see the value of assessment and want to use it to increase their ability to help their students succeed.

### **Chapter Summary**

The purpose of this chapter has been to present the results of the two major portions of this study—the individual interviews and the Delphi survey. The research questions in this study were explored by involving a panel of student-affairs assessment experts providing opinions to develop a Delphi survey and administering three iterations or rounds of the survey. Consensus of agreement was met for all but 10 statements that emerged from the initial individual interviews with four assessment experts. The results were described and summarized to determine the qualities of student-affairs professionals who have an assessment disposition and

how these qualities could be developed. The results of this study have implications for student affairs as well as future research in student-affairs assessment. These are discussed in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 5. DISCUSSION

Although assessment has been a stated value in the student-affairs profession since its beginnings, the engagement in assessment for some student-affairs professionals is still lacking and often put aside for other things. Recent efforts to improve assessment practice in student affairs have often focused on the development of skills and knowledge, and while these are important and contribute greatly, there are many reasons why student affairs professionals have not incorporated assessment into their daily work. The purpose of this study has been to seek information that could help in filling this gap by understanding what attitudes, values, and beliefs would increase the propensity that student-affairs professionals will integrate assessment into their work. An additional purpose of the study has been to discover ways this assessment disposition could be developed.

The Delphi research technique was the chosen method for this study to develop a framework that describes the qualities of an assessment disposition of student-affairs professionals who serve in practitioner roles. Additionally, the conditions and actions that support the development of an assessment disposition were explored. The participants were student-affairs assessment experts who have extensive experience working on assessment with those student-affairs professionals who develop and deliver programs and services. The opinions of four assessment experts were utilized to create a survey instrument, and the survey was administered in three iterations with a broader panel of assessment experts serving as participants.

As the final chapter of this dissertation, its overall purpose is to express the meaning and value this study brings to the discussion about assessment as well as the work of student affairs. The sections of this chapter include (1) a summary of the study, specifically focused the results

as they relate to the research questions; (2) discussion; (3) limitations of the study; (4) implications of the study on theory; (5) implications for future research; and finally, (6) implications for practice.

### **Summary of the Study**

The first research question in this study asked, “What are the defining qualities of student-affairs professionals who demonstrate an assessment disposition?” Through the initial interviews with the four assessment experts, certain categories of the assessment disposition emerged along with various qualities that define these categories. The convergence of opinions from the panel of experts used for the Delphi survey largely supported these ideas. The qualities that help define an assessment disposition are categorized as follows: (1) personal and professional qualities; (2) perceptions of assessment; and (3) approach to assessment. In other words, the propensity for student-affairs professionals to engage in assessment can be influenced by some of their own personality traits such as being learner-focused and collaborative. The likelihood that student-affairs professionals engage in assessment can also be influenced by how they view it. For example, believing that assessment contributes to improvement in their work and informs more effective decision making can become a motivating factor for taking the time to do assessment. Finally, how student-affairs professionals approach assessment includes their attitude towards assessment and their belief in their own abilities to practice it. A positive attitude and confidence that they can do assessment, even if they do not know everything about it, will likely increase their engagement in assessment.

The second research question was focused on ways an assessment disposition could be developed. Again, the categories and ideas that emerged from interviews with the initial four experts were largely supported by the panel of experts who engaged in the Delphi survey

process. Five categories of conditions that could support the development of an assessment disposition were identified: (1) engagement; (2) work environment; (3) success with assessment; (4) training and development; and (5) student learning. Each of these categories includes items in which the panel of experts agreed could influence the development of an assessment disposition. The final category, student learning, is perhaps the least like the others. The first four categories include activities that would directly impact the development of an assessment disposition. However, student learning is about having a positive disposition for student learning that can then lead to an assessment disposition that supports and improves student learning.

### **Discussion**

Assessment in student affairs is regarded as an important component of the student-affairs profession. The foundational documents that formed the profession as well as many of the documents written in more recent times encourage student-affairs professionals to engage in assessment as a means for continual evaluation of their work, improvement of programs and services, effective management of limited and declining resources, and greater impacts on student learning and development. Additionally, assessment has become a significant tool in addressing the accountability pressures from external stakeholders as well as an important component of institutional accreditation, in which student affairs has more recently played a greater role.

Although it is a valued part of the profession, assessment practice is lacking. There have been numerous efforts to increase the assessment skills and knowledge of student-affairs professionals, and student affairs divisions and units have invested in creating cultures that encourage assessment practice. However, there are many reasons the engagement of assessment and integration of it into regular student-affairs practice is not happening as would be expected.

Some of these reasons are directly related to the beliefs, values, and attitudes some student-affairs professionals have regarding assessment.

The beliefs, values, and attitudes one holds towards something make-up their disposition, and social-cognitive theory and mindset research propose that these qualities directly influence habits and behaviors. The purpose of this study has been to explore assessment disposition as a component, along with skills and knowledge, that will help student-affairs professionals generate habits and behaviors to fully incorporate assessment into their work. The results of this study include two frameworks about assessment disposition. The first defines the qualities that make-up an assessment disposition, and the other framework presents the various approaches in which this disposition could be developed. As such, this study not only contributes to the discussion around student-affairs assessment practice, but it also moves the conversation forward with new ideas to be considered and utilized.

The value of this study is that it takes the idea that student-affairs professionals would benefit from developing an assessment disposition and it presents a concrete model of the make-up of an assessment disposition. These results align well with the writings of others who have worked to advance the profession's understanding and use of assessment. These ideas are taken one step further by identifying the specific qualities of an assessment disposition and as well as framing these qualities in practical ways. The personal and professional qualities identified in this study, for example, may help reprioritize the qualities sought in recruiting and hiring student-affairs professionals. These changes would eventually contribute to the transformation of the profession that is necessary in meeting the demands of today's higher education environment. Understanding the perceptions about assessment and ways to approach it that will help student-affairs professionals incorporate assessment into their practice can not only reshape

how they view assessment, but it also influences overall perceptions they have about their work. Therefore, considering how assessment is discussed and explained is important. For example, there are times when senior student affairs officers respond to accountability demands from presidents and external stakeholders by focusing on assessment to only show the value or worth of student affairs. Thus, they may lose sight of the importance of supporting assessment for the improvement of programs and services. Further, staff in these student-affairs divisions may perceive the purpose or value of assessment is for accountability, and therefore, they will be turned-off from the idea of assessment because it is far removed from their daily work.

Assessment, in these cases, can become a burden and the attitudes towards it can become negative. Additionally, programs and services are likely to become stagnant or approaches for improvement will be random, rather than data-driven. On the other hand, a senior student affairs officer who understands how the perceptions about assessment influence the possibility their staff will engage in it are likely to frame assessment in a very different way. They can see that accountability pressures can be addressed when assessment is utilized to continually evaluate and improve programs and services, and they will support assessment work from this point of view.

The second part of this study focused on ways an assessment disposition could be developed, and the results provide even more practical information that can be used to help move the student-affairs assessment agenda forward. Under each of the five categories identified as methods or conditions that can help with the development of an assessment disposition are lists of various approaches that could be utilized to meet student-affairs professionals where they are regarding assessment work. For example, student-affairs professionals could improve their disposition towards assessment by engaging in it. However, there are several ways they can engage with assessment, and it can be speculated that some approaches would be more effective



than others, dependent upon the experiences, needs, and characteristics of each person.

Engaging with assessment by observing others and seeing how others use assessment might be a good starting point for some individuals, whereas others might benefit most from working on a small project, perhaps with a mentor to discuss the project as it develops. The work environment category includes a list with the most number of conditions or approaches that can help in the development of an assessment disposition. Overall, they depict a work environment where assessment is embedded throughout. However, the discussion presented by the panelists in this study also provide some cautionary considerations. Although the panelists eventually reached consensus of agreement that assessment should be part of responsibility reviews and high levels of accountability are important in the development of an assessment disposition, the panelists' discussion around these topics encourage student-affairs leaders and supervisors to approach these two ideas with consideration and care. Responsibility reviews can include how well personnel are engaging in assessment, however, reviewing staff based on the results of assessment could be inappropriate and counter to the development of a positive attitude or motivation for assessment. Similarly, holding staff members accountable for utilizing assessment and making improvements is very different than having high levels of accountability for the assessment outcomes.

Although this study was not focused specifically on student learning and assessment, the results provide two important considerations. First, the fifth category regarding the ways an assessment disposition could be developed is by having or developing a disposition for student learning. Student-affairs professionals who value student learning and are focused in this area are likely to see assessment as an important component for the improvement of student learning. Therefore, they will value assessment and be motivated to engage in it. On the other hand, the

panelists in this study did not find consensus of agreement that to have an assessment disposition student-affairs professionals must also value their role as educators. Arguments against this idea stemmed from the fact that not all student-affairs professionals see themselves as educators. Additionally, there was no consensus of agreement that it is important that student-affairs professionals want to learn more about the student-affairs profession. This may have something to do with the fact that there are many people in student-affairs professional roles that did not start their careers in student affairs or they do not have a traditional student-affairs degree. The point of this discussion is that while having a value for student learning and the educator role can have a positive effect on the development of an assessment disposition, it cannot be assumed that approaching assessment from only the perspective that it is for student learning is an approach that will work for everyone.

As discussed further in the implication sections to follow, although the concept of disposition, or mindset, have been considered in the discussions regarding student-affairs assessment competencies and practice, this study goes one step further by specifically delineating what assessment disposition is and the conditions that support it. The frameworks presented here can be used to enhance position descriptions and qualifications for student-affairs personnel, create graduate school curriculum, inform regular student-affairs business practices, and be incorporated into professional development opportunities offered by organizations and institutions. Additionally, this study is likely to initiate more research studies on this topic, testing the outcomes of this study as well as expanding the understanding of assessment disposition perhaps to subpopulations within the student affairs or new populations, such as faculty.

## **Limitations**

As with all studies, there are limitations within this study that were mostly unavoidable, but must be acknowledged. First, while this study was supported by the opinions of experts who have extensive experience working with and supporting student-affairs professionals in their assessment work, it is limited by the voices that are not included in the study. Specifically, this study did not include opinions of the student-affairs professionals themselves as experts of their own experiences. Second, the selection of the assessment experts was limited by identifying those who have been active in student-affairs assessment groups such as the NASPA and ACPA assessment committees and the Student Affairs Assessment Leaders listserv. It is likely there are other student-affairs assessment experts who are not publicly active, but who may have contributed as well and may have broadened the discussion. Finally, the length of the Delphi survey and the time between survey iterations, approximately one month each, may have contributed to the drop-out of participants from one iteration to another. There were 29 participants in the first survey iteration, 20 participants in the second iteration, and 18 participants in the final iteration. While these numbers of participants still fell into the guidelines of 15 to 50 participants for a Delphi study (Hsu & Sanford, 2007), the loss of these opinions potentially limits the results.

## **Implications for Theory**

The review of literature that precipitated this study included evidence that if student-affairs professionals possessed or developed an assessment disposition the likelihood that they would more effectively incorporate assessment into their work would increase. The *Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937) introduced the idea that student-affairs professionals must study the effectiveness of their work and use this information

to make improvements. Additionally, the authors of this document and its second version (American Council on Education Studies, 1949) forwarded the importance of student learning and development that takes place outside the classroom, mostly facilitated by student-affairs professionals. Many years later, scholars and practitioners are still grappling with ways student-affairs professionals could fulfill this responsibility of studying their own work and improving student outcomes. Love and Estanek (2004) introduced the idea of an assessment mindset, indicating that such a framework would reshape the work of student-affairs professionals. In 2015, the *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) was updated from its earlier version to include disposition, along with skills and knowledge, as essential competencies. However, the competencies related to assessment, evaluation, and research focus primarily on knowledge and skills. The results of this study support the ideas of Love and Estanek (2004) by delineating qualities of the assessment mindset as well as ways this mindset could be shaped. The study also supports the foundational documents of the student affairs profession by affirming that assessment in student-affairs is important and that disposition matters in all the competency areas, including assessment.

The results of this study included that assessment disposition can be a product of the personal and professional qualities a student-affairs professional brings to their work. The qualities associated with this area include having a belief that their own talents can be developed and a value for feedback and self-improvement. These qualities are strongly associated with Dweck's (2006) research on mindset and, specifically, a growth mindset, the belief in one's ability to learn and grow. Additionally, Dweck discovered that both children and adults, under certain circumstances, can move from a fixed mindset to a growth mindset. Steps in this process include recognizing that there are two mindsets and that individuals have a choice in which

perspective they view certain situations. The next steps are to make a choice about how they want to view the situation and then act on it from that mindset. Some of the strategies for the development of an assessment disposition align well with this research. For example, based on the results of this study, student affairs professionals may not be willing to engage in assessment because they believe it is too difficult and they doubt their abilities. However, by observing others doing assessment and succeeding in it, they may begin to recognize that they have a choice in how they view assessment and begin to believe they too can engage in it and succeed.

Finally, literature regarding the improvement of assessment practice in student affairs includes discussion regarding the creation of cultures of assessment (Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009; Culp & Dungey, 2012; Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, & Whitt, 2011). The institutional “ethic of positive restlessness” (Kuh, et al., 2011, p. 14) is like the individual student-affairs professional’s qualities of curiosity, intellectual inquisitiveness, and the desire for continuous improvement. Many of the items regarding the development of an assessment disposition described in this study support the ideas surrounding the culture of assessment literature and present a framework regarding how these cultures can be developed.

### **Implications for Research**

This research not only extends the conversation of previous literature about student affairs and assessment, but it also raises new questions and sets a foundation for future research. First, this study sets forward a framework of assessment disposition qualities and a framework for how they could be developed. A research study that uses these frameworks to test them with student-affairs professionals who are engaged in assessment at various levels would produce additional understandings regarding the assessment disposition. It is uncertain how these qualities and developmental strategies differ among various subgroups of student-affairs

professionals. This researcher recommends future studies that use these frameworks to compare their applicability to student-affairs staff with differing areas of focus, such as programmatic, administrative, and service-delivery. Other subpopulations should include entry-, mid-, and senior-level student-affairs professionals. Expanding this line of research to populations outside of student affairs, such as faculty, also has merit. Having a greater understanding of how these frameworks apply could strengthen their applicability to these various groups that have differing characteristics and needs.

There are 41 qualities of student-affairs professionals that were identified through this study and that support an assessment disposition. However, the study did not focus on placing specific value on each of these qualities. In other words, it is uncertain if some qualities are more important or valued than others in contributing to an assessment disposition. For instance, is it possible that certain qualities contribute more than others in the development of an assessment disposition? Future research studies should include examining these qualities further from an evaluative point of view.

As noted in the limitations, this study utilized the opinions of student-affairs assessment experts who work with student-affairs professionals to identify the qualities of an assessment disposition and ways it can be developed. However, the voices of the student-affairs professionals themselves were not utilized. Assuming this population meets the Delphi standard that participants be experts on the topic, replication of this study with student-affairs professionals as the expert participants would expand what is known about assessment disposition and would provide valuable comparable data with the results of this current study.

The implications for practice are discussed in the next section and include applying the research results to the creation of professional development activities regarding assessment

disposition. The framework for the development of an assessment disposition that was presented in this study could be studied further to determine which developmental activities are most effective in various situations with student-affairs professionals with various levels of assessment disposition. This information would help educators, trainers, and others make informed decisions regarding the best approach in helping emerging and current student-affairs professionals develop their assessment dispositions.

There were some items in this study that did not reach consensus, but also produced discussion among the participants. Exploring these opinions further through additional research is recommended. For example, whether all student-affairs professionals are educators or should view themselves as educators was met with opposing points of view. While this may ultimately be a philosophical discussion, further research on this topic and its impact on the engagement of assessment could help further shape the profession and the discussion regarding assessment disposition.

From a methodological perspective, the Delphi method was a good fit for this study; however, there are some notable lessons that should be considered for future Delphi studies. First, researchers who engage in the Delphi method must determine how consensus will be defined and measured based on the type of data being collected (Hsu & Sanford, 2007). For this study, it was decided that consensus would be reached for each item when 80% of the participants selected *strongly agree* or *agree* (combined); *uncertain*; or *strongly disagree* or *disagree* (combined). This higher threshold of consensus was appropriate for this somewhat homogenous group of expert participants. For future Delphi studies it is recommended that researchers consider the subject matter as well as the profile of the panel members to help guide

the consensus decision. Piloting the instrument with a small group of participants may also help future researchers in determining their criteria for consensus decisions.

The selection of the response options for a Likert-type scale is also something future researchers should consider in the development of a Delphi survey instrument. For this study, participants were given the option to select *uncertain* as their response to each item. If participants did not select *strongly agree* or *agree*, it was likely that they selected *uncertain* over *strongly disagree* or *disagree*. To better understand participants' opinions, it is recommended that researchers consider the implications of offering *uncertain* as an option. If it is included in the scale it is also recommended that participants' comments be differentiated based on the type of response they selected on the scale. Doing so would present a clearer picture of the participant's point of view and allow other participants a greater ability to consider these opinions for subsequent iterations of the survey.

### **Implications for Practice**

The results of this study offer practical knowledge that can be incorporated into the work of student-affairs professionals and those who provide support and education for emerging and even experienced professionals in this field. There are several ways these results could be utilized in student-affairs practice. First, among the qualities that contribute to an assessment disposition are personal and professional qualities that student-affairs professionals might naturally bring to their positions. These individuals typically value and believe in self-growth, have a desire to understand and learn, and have an interest in building collaborative relationships. Employers who are seeking candidates who are ready, or at least who are likely, to incorporate assessment into their work might find success in recruiting and hiring individuals with these qualities. This approach supports previous propositions that for assessment to become part of student-affairs



practice, it needs to be incorporated into the expectations and vetting of candidates for student-affairs positions (Hoffman & Bresciani, 2010).

As noted earlier in this dissertation, the *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (ACPA & NASPA, 2015) includes listings of the skills and knowledge necessary for student-affairs professional to be successful in their field. The importance of disposition was recently added to the competencies as also important; however, the competency area of Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (ACPA & NASPA, 2015, p. 20) focuses largely on what student-affairs professionals should know and should be able to do, rather than what they should value or believe. As an evolving profession, it is likely the competency areas will be reviewed again in the future. When this occurs, it is recommended that the authors consider the dispositional qualities revealed in this study as a more comprehensive set of assessment-related competencies for student-affairs professionals. In the interim, those who use the *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* to guide their own professional development or the development of others might also consider incorporating the dispositional qualities from this study into their efforts.

Graduate programs in student affairs should consider the formation of graduate students to include the development of values, belief, and attitudes toward assessment that will make it a natural part of their future work in student affairs. The results of this study offer several ways this could be accomplished. First, incorporating assessment as a regular part of the curriculum throughout the program will help students understand that assessment is part of regular practice and not a separate or stand-alone effort. Incorporating assessment into class discussions and class projects was well as modeling the use of assessment to make improvements to the program

itself are all ways to help graduate students learn to value assessment, have meaningful experiences with assessment, and view it as an important part of their work.

Student-affairs leaders who want to build a culture of assessment that supports personnel in doing assessment work should also consider the information that emerged from this study. The participants in this study identified and agreed that there are several ways the work environment could be formed to support positive beliefs, values, and attitudes towards assessment and encourage student-affairs professionals in conducting and using assessment in their daily work. Leaders and supervisors can start by including assessment as a part of position descriptions, thus, making room in each person's workload for assessment practice. Addressing assessment in responsibility reviews is also important, but supervisors must consider this carefully. Employees should be evaluated on their work with assessment, but assessment results should not necessarily be a source for responsibility reviews. Doing so, is likely to create a culture of fear and negative attitudes towards assessment. Additionally, the topic of assessment should be incorporated into regular business practices such as meetings, reports, and discussions. Recognizing staff members for engaging in assessment and utilizing the results can also foster positive attitudes toward assessment not only for those being recognized but also for those who see others experiencing success by engaging in assessment. Utilizing the assessment cycle or the assessment loop as part of annual planning and decision making will also help personnel understand how assessment is being used and the value it adds to their work. Finally, providing opportunities for student-affairs personnel to have help with their assessment efforts can help them overcome fear they might have in their ability to conduct assessment.

Finally, the results of this study should be considered in the creation of assessment-related professional development and training. This could include learning opportunities in the

workplace as well as development and training offered through professional organizations, conferences, institutes, workshops, and certificate programs. While the development of assessment knowledge and skills are important, forming these opportunities in ways that enhance assessment disposition is also important. One of the most important approaches would be to form the training and development so student-affairs professionals can make a direct connection between assessment and their daily work. In other words, the more meaningful and practical their experiences can be the more likely they will be to develop a positive attitude toward assessment and a willingness to continue learning about it. For those student-affairs professionals who are focused on student learning and other student outcomes, it is also important that they can connect assessment work with making improvements for students. Further, training and development that engages student-affairs professionals with others who already have a positive assessment disposition will likely influence the development of an assessment disposition. These relationships could be with mentors or will peers.

### **Conclusion**

This study was initiated to explore how student-affairs professionals might overcome the barriers that have prevented them from fully engaging in assessment as part of their regular practice. Although assessment has been encouraged from both philosophical and practical perspectives and there have been many efforts to support the development of assessment competencies in student-affairs professionals, the barriers that still exist have limited assessment practice in the profession. Many development efforts have focused on knowledge and skills, and while these are important components, student-affairs professionals also need positive beliefs, values, and beliefs towards assessment. This study utilized the opinions of student-affairs assessment experts to define the qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition and

concluded that there are personal and professional qualities that contribute to this disposition along with the perceptions student-affairs professionals have about assessment and their approach to assessment. Additionally, there are a number conditions and activities that can contribute towards the development of an assessment disposition. These include the experiences student-affairs professionals have with assessment as well as environmental factors and opportunities to learn more about assessment. Overall, this study contributes to the on-going discussion regarding student-affairs practice and assessment by presenting frameworks that can be utilized by individuals and organizations to improve assessment practice in student affairs. This study also offers a foundation on which other studies could be developed.

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## APPENDIX A. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD LETTER OF APPROVAL



February 4, 2016

Dr. Chris Ray  
School of Education

Re: IRB Certification of Exempt Human Subjects Research:  
Protocol #HE16181, "Student Affairs Assessment Disposition"

Co-investigator(s) and research team: Karla Thoennes

Certification Date: 2/4/2016 Expiration Date: 2/3/2019  
Study site(s): varied  
Sponsor: n/a

The above referenced human subjects research project has been certified as exempt (category # 2b) in accordance with federal regulations (Code of Federal Regulations, Title 45, Part 46, Protection of Human Subjects). This determination is based on the original protocol submission (received 2/1/2016).

Please also note the following:

- If you wish to continue the research after the expiration, submit a request for recertification several weeks prior to the expiration.
- The study must be conducted as described in the approved protocol. Changes to this protocol must be approved prior to initiating, unless the changes are necessary to eliminate an immediate hazard to subjects.
- Notify the IRB promptly of any adverse events, complaints, or unanticipated problems involving risks to subjects or others related to this project.
- Report any significant new findings that may affect the risks and benefits to the participants and the IRB.

Research records may be subject to a random or directed audit at any time to verify compliance with IRB standard operating procedures.

Thank you for your cooperation with NDSU IRB procedures. Best wishes for a successful study.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Kristy Shirley".

Digitally signed by Kristy Shirley  
DN: c=US, o=NDSU,  
ou=Institutional Review Board,  
email=kristy\_shirley@ndsu.edu, cn=US  
Date: 2016.02.04 16:22:51 -0500

Kristy Shirley, CIP, Research Compliance Administrator

For more information regarding IRB Office submissions and guidelines, please consult [http://www.ndsu.edu/research/integrity\\_compliance/irb/](http://www.ndsu.edu/research/integrity_compliance/irb/). This Institution has an approved FederalWide Assurance with the Department of Health and Human Services: FWA00002439.

### INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD

NDSU Dept 4000 | PO Box 6050 | Fargo ND 58108-6050 | 701.231.8995 | Fax 701.231.8098 | [ndsu.edu/irb](http://ndsu.edu/irb)

Shipping address: Research 1, 1735 NDSU Research Park Drive, Fargo ND 58102

NDSU is an EO/AA university.

## **APPENDIX B. INVITATION FOR INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW PROTOCOL**

Dear Colleague:

My name is Karla Thoennes, and I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at North Dakota State University with over 25 years of professional experience in student affairs. I am conducting a research study to develop a framework regarding the qualities of an assessment disposition for student-affairs professionals.

You have been identified as an expert in the field of student-affairs assessment, and you are one of a select group of professionals being asked to participate in a personal interview about this topic. Responses from the interviews will be used to build a Delphi survey. The Delphi survey will be utilized to determine consensus on individual topic statements for a variety of categories. Through this process, the panel will provide valuable data about what an assessment disposition is and how it could be developed by student-affairs professionals.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, and you may change your mind or quit participating at any time with no penalty; however, your assistance would be greatly appreciated in making this study meaningful. I anticipate that the interview will be about 30-45 minutes. I will schedule the interview at a time that is convenient for you, and we will use a medium (telephone or video conference) that works best for you.

Attached is the participant consent form which we will review as part of the personal interview. Your acceptance of this invitation and subsequent participation in the interview will indicate your consent. If you are interested and able to participate in this study, please respond to this email by Sunday, February 21, 2016, to schedule an interview. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Karla Thoennes  
Doctoral Candidate, North Dakota State University  
[karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu](mailto:karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu)  
701-799-0473

## APPENDIX C. INDIVIDUAL INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Education Doctoral Program  
School of Education

### INTERVIEW CONSENT FORM

**Title of Research Study:** Assessment Disposition: Qualities and Strategies for Development in Student-Affairs Professionals

**This study is being conducted by:** Karla Thoennes, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education, under the direction of faculty adviser Dr. Chris Ray.

**Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?** You have been identified as an expert in the field of student-affairs assessment and are invited to participate in this research study. Please read the following document and ask any questions before you agree to participate in the study.

**What is the purpose of the study?** The purpose of this study is to determine the defining qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition that would more effectively help student-affairs professionals integrate assessment into their practice. A second purpose is to explore the ways that this disposition can be developed by student-affairs professionals.

**What is the time commitment and timeline of the study?** The individual interview will be approximately 30-45 minutes and will be scheduled at a time that is convenient for you. The interviews will be completed by February 29, 2016.

**How do I qualify to participate?** In order to meet the criteria to participate in the study, you must verify that you have at least 1 year of experience working in higher education assessment and at least a portion of your responsibility is/was dedicated to providing direct support and collaboration for assessment with student-affairs professionals.

**Do I have to take part in the study?** Your participation is voluntary, and you may change your mind or quit participating at any time with no penalty; however, your assistance would be greatly appreciated in making this study meaningful.

**What will I be asked to do?** If you agree to participate, you will be interviewed via telephone or video conference, and your responses will be audio recorded. You will be asked a variety of questions about the attitudes, beliefs, and values of student-affairs professionals related to the incorporation of assessment with their daily work. Your responses to these questions will be analyzed for common themes and used to develop a Delphi survey instrument.

**Who will have access to the information I provide?** Only the researcher and her faculty adviser will have access to the responses. The recordings will be stored on a password-protected

device. All responses from the interview will be kept strictly confidential, and names will not be linked to individual responses. The data will be reported as grouped data in the final report. If you choose to participate, your name and institutional information will be listed as one of the expert panelists along with others who choose to participate in the study. After the research has been completed, the audio recordings will be destroyed.

**What are the potential risks?** Please keep in mind that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but I have taken reasonable precautions to minimize any known risks. No monetary compensation will be provided for your participation.

**Who do I contact if I have questions or concerns?** If you have any questions about this study, please contact me at 701.799.0473 or [karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu](mailto:karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu). You may also contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Chris Ray, at 701.231.7417 or [chris.ray@ndsu.edu](mailto:chris.ray@ndsu.edu).

**What are my rights as a research participant?** You have rights as a participant in research. If you have questions about the rights of human participants in research or to report a problem, you may contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program at 701.231.8995, toll-free at 855.800.6717, or via email at [ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu](mailto:ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu).

## APPENDIX D. INTERVIEW PROTOCOL AND QUESTIONS

Title of NDSU Research Study:  
ASSESSMENT DISPOSITION: QUALITIES AND STRATEGIES FOR  
DEVELOPMENT IN STUDENT-AFFAIRS PROFESSIONALS

Hi, my name is Karla Thoennes, and I am a doctoral candidate at North Dakota State University. We have been in contact via email, and you recently agreed to schedule time for a personal interview as part of my study titled Assessment Disposition: Qualities and Strategies for Development in Student-Affairs Professionals. Additionally, I included a copy of the informed consent regarding this study in my email to you. Do you have any questions about the interview or the study?

As a reminder, I will be recording the interview. I will later review responses from all the interviews to identify overall themes and to develop items for a Delphi survey.

In order to meet the criteria to participate in the study, you must have at least 1 year of experience working in higher education assessment and at least a portion of your responsibility is/was dedicated to providing direct support and collaboration for assessment with student-affairs professionals. Do these criteria accurately describe your experience?

Before we begin with the questions, I will use the terms assessment, student-affairs professional, and disposition as part of this interview. I would like to provide some clarity about how these terms have been defined for the context of this study.

- **Assessment** is a gathering of information about a particular program or group of programs in order to improve that program or programs while contributing to student development and learning.
- A **student-affairs professional** is an individual who is trained to carry out student-affairs functions and programs. The student-affairs professionals referred to specifically in this study are people who serve in practitioner roles, actively engaged in the delivery of student-affairs programs and services.
- **Disposition** is the attitudes, beliefs, and values that precipitate habits of behavior or action. A synonym for disposition is the term mindset.

### QUESTIONS

- 1) How would you describe your responsibility in working with student-affairs professionals related to assessment tasks and projects?
  - a. What is the professional level, if any, that you work with most? Entry, Mid, or Senior?
- 2) In general, how would you describe a student-affairs professional who has an assessment disposition?
  - a. What behaviors or habits do these student-affairs professionals display?

- 3) To what degree do you believe disposition plays a role in student-affairs professionals' success at incorporating assessment with their daily work?
- 4) What attitudes about assessment have you observed from student-affairs professionals with whom you have worked?
- 5) What values about assessment have you observed in student-affairs professionals?
- 6) What beliefs about assessment have you observed from student-affairs professionals?
- 7) Are there certain attitudes, values, or beliefs about assessment that help student-affairs professionals be more likely to engage in assessment?
- 8) In regards to student-affairs professionals engaging in assessment work, what attitudes, values, and/or beliefs have you witnessed that have impacted this work?
  - a. How have these attitudes, values, and/or beliefs impacted the assessment work?
- 9) Can you share an example where you have observed a student-affairs professional utilizing assessment to improve student development and/or learning?
  - a. In this example, what have you observed about the person's attitude, values, and/or beliefs about student learning?
- 10) How do student-affairs professionals develop a disposition for assessment?
  - a. Does the position a student-affairs professional holds impact how he/she could or would develop an assessment disposition? If so, in that ways?
  - b. Does the number of years of experience impact how people could or would develop an assessment disposition?
  - c. What strategies, if any, have you used to help student-affairs professionals improve their disposition towards assessment, assessment work, and using assessment to improve student development and learning?
- 11) Are there any other thoughts you would like to share to contribute to the research?
- 12) Are you potentially interested in continuing your participation with this study by participating in the Delphi survey?

Thank you again for your assistance. Within the next week, I will send you a summary of the topics we discussed today to ensure I have captured your thoughts and ideas accurately. I truly appreciate your participation in this study.



## APPENDIX E. STATEMENTS REGARDING DISPOSITIONAL QUALITIES

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...	
<b>Question Block 1</b>	
1a	Believe assessment is for more than accreditation
1b	Believe the purpose of assessment is for improvement of programs and/or services
1c	Believe assessment can help with decision making
1d	Believe assessment is useful for obtaining resources
<b>Question Block 2</b>	
2a	Believe their own talents can be developed
2b	Value focusing on strengths rather than limitations
2c	Are inquisitive learners
2d	Are intellectually curious
2e	Value the process of learning
2f	Value innovation
<b>Question Block 3</b>	
3a	Have a positive attitude toward assessment
3b	Enjoy doing assessment
3c	See assessment as an integral part of their job responsibilities
3d	Are intrinsically motivated to do assessment
3e	Are willing to put resources towards assessment
3f	Value feedback
3g	Value self-improvement
3h	Are committed to asking questions about the effectiveness of their work
<b>Question Block 4</b>	
4a	Feel competent enough to do assessment
4b	Feel empowered to do assessment
4c	Believe assessment is worth their time
4d	Are open to assessment regardless of the results
4e	Believe assessment results will not be used against them
4f	Do not take assessment results personally
<b>Question Block 5</b>	
5a	Value collaboration
5b	Are interested in working with others to gain assessment knowledge and/or skills they may not already have
5c	Are interested in building relationships to make assessment successful
5d	Value engagement in professional dialogues
5e	Value working with others across the institution
<b>Question Block 6</b>	
6a	Believe in the importance of the assessment cycle
6b	Value reflective practice
6c	Believe assessment must be well thought-out, but not overly complex
6d	Believe that theory should be incorporated into assessment
6e	Want to do a good job with assessment
6f	Want to learn more about assessment by doing assessment
<b>Question Block 7</b>	
7a	Value their role as an educator
7b	Believe assessment is critical to facilitating student success
7c	Believe assessment is an avenue to enhance student learning
7d	Believe learning takes place in and out of the classroom
7e	Are interested in exploring the impact of interventions on student learning and development
7f	Are interested in understanding the effects of programs and services
<b>Question Block 8</b>	
8a	Are interested in learning about the student-affairs profession
8b	Believe assessment is critical to the success of student affairs
8c	Believe assessment is a best practice in student affairs
8d	Believe assessment helps tell the story of student affairs
8e	Believe student affairs work impacts student learning
8f	Are motivated to demonstrate the role student affairs plays in student learning

## APPENDIX F. STATEMENTS REGARDING DEVELOPMENT OF DISPOSITION

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...	
<b>Question Block 9</b>	
9a	They have high levels of accountability
9b	They are expected to meet accreditation standards
9c	They feel a need to demonstrate the value of their work to others
9d	Assessment work is expected for more than accountability
9e	Assessment is not simply an “add-on” to their work responsibilities
9f	Assessment is part of their performance reviews
<b>Question Block 10</b>	
10a	They see examples of assessment that demonstrate it is not overly complicated and/or difficult
10b	They recognize they are already doing assessment, even if it's less formal
10c	They can see concrete examples of assessment projects
10d	They have access to help with their assessment
<b>Question Block 11</b>	
11a	They have opportunities to engage in assessment
11b	They engage in assessment work that is meaningful to them
11c	They engage in assessment work that is valuable to them
11d	Their assessment work involves more than just gathering data
11e	They experience small victories around assessment
11f	They engage frequently in conversations about assessment
11g	Assessment is embedded into their practice
<b>Question Block 12</b>	
12a	They are around others who have an assessment disposition
12b	They have mentors who model an assessment disposition
12c	They build relationships with others who have an assessment disposition
12d	They are placed in assessment work groups
12e	They see others using assessment meaningfully
12f	They are involved in professional associations that foster a broader perspective about assessment
<b>Question Block 13</b>	
13a	Their institutional infrastructure supports assessment practice
13b	Discussion about assessment is incorporated into meetings
13d	Assessment is integrated into processes (e.g., annual reports, strategic planning)
13e	They feel supported to engage in assessment
13f	They are encouraged to engage in assessment
13g	They are rewarded for doing assessment
13h	They are recognized for their assessment work
<b>Question Block 14</b>	
14a	Assessment work is fun for them
14b	They experience self-satisfaction from their assessment work
14c	They utilize assessment to demonstrate the value of their work
14d	Assessment is a tool that helps them obtain resources
14e	Assessment projects are clearly aligned with other parts of their work
14f	They associate assessment as an integral part of the institution
<b>Question Block 15</b>	
15a	Student learning is a priority in their work
15b	They can see how assessment helps students
15c	They associate assessment with helping students succeed
15d	They have training on how students learn
15e	They know how to gather evidence to measure student outcomes
<b>Question Block 16</b>	
16a	Assessment training is part of their formal education
16b	Assessment training is part of their professional development
16c	Their supervisor supports opportunities for assessment training
16d	Assessment training is congruent with their level of assessment experience
16e	They have learned simple assessment techniques
16f	They have increased their assessment knowledge
16g	They have developed assessment skills

## APPENDIX G. ROUND-ONE SURVEY INVITATION

Subject: Student-Affairs Assessment Disposition—Research Invitation

Dear Higher Education Colleague:

I am a student-affairs professional and a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at North Dakota State University. I am conducting a research study to develop a framework regarding the qualities of an assessment disposition for student-affairs professionals.

You have been identified as an expert in the field of student-affairs assessment, and you are one of a small group of professionals being asked to participate as a panel expert in a Delphi study about this topic. Through this process the panel will provide valuable data about what an assessment disposition is and how it could be developed by student-affairs professionals.

Your participation is entirely voluntary, however, your assistance would be greatly appreciated in making this study meaningful. I anticipate that your participation will include 3 survey iterations over a 3-month period. If you are interested and able to participate in this study, please access the survey via the link below and complete the survey by Wednesday, June 15, 2016. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Karla Thoennes  
Doctoral Candidate, North Dakota State University  
[karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu](mailto:karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu)  
701-799-0473

**Follow this link to the Survey:**

[\\${1://SurveyLink?d=Take the survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[\\${1://SurveyURL}](#)

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[\\${1://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

## APPENDIX H. ROUND-ONE SURVEY

**NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Education Doctoral Program**  
**School of Education**

### **DELPHI SURVEY PROTOCOL CONSENT FORM**

**Title of Research Study:** Assessment Disposition: Qualities and Strategies for Development in Student-Affairs Professionals

**This study is being conducted by:** Karla Thoennes, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education, under the direction of faculty adviser Dr. Chris Ray.

**Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?** You have been identified as an expert in the field of student-affairs assessment and are invited to participate in this research study. Please read the following document and ask any questions before you agree to participate in the study.

**What is the purpose of the study?** The purpose of this study is to determine the defining qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition that would more effectively help student-affairs professionals integrate assessment into their practice. A second purpose is to explore the ways that this disposition can be developed by student-affairs professionals.

**What is the time commitment and timeline of the study?** It is anticipated that this study will consist of three iterations of surveys administered online via Qualtrics survey software. Each survey should take about 30 minutes to complete. The first round of the survey is open now and will remain open until June 15, 2016. It is anticipated that the final round for this study will be completed by August 15, 2016.

**How do I qualify to participate?** In order to meet the criteria to participate in the study, you must verify that you have at least 1 year of experience working in higher-education assessment and at least a portion of your responsibility is or was dedicated to providing direct support and collaboration for assessment with student-affairs professionals.

**Do I have to take part in the study?** Your participation is voluntary, and you may change your mind or quit participating at any time with no penalty; however, your assistance would be greatly appreciated in making this study meaningful.

**What will I be asked to do?** You will be part of a Delphi study to express your opinions and ideas concerning the assessment disposition of student-affairs professionals. It is anticipated that this study will be completed in three survey rounds. During each round, you will be asked to respond to topic statements using a Likert-type scale for levels of agreement and

importance. You will also have the opportunity to include comments and suggestions for future topic statements.

**Who will have access to the information I provide?** Only the researcher and faculty adviser will have access to the responses. All responses from the surveys will be kept strictly confidential, and names will not be linked to individual responses. The data will be reported as grouped data in the final report. If you choose to participate, your name and institutional information will be listed as one of the expert panelists along with others who choose to participate in the study.

**What are the potential risks?** Please keep in mind that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but reasonable precautions have been taken to minimize any known risks. No monetary compensation will be provided for your participation.

**Who do I contact if I have questions or concerns?** If you have any questions about this study, please contact Karla Thoennes at 701.799.0473 or [karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu](mailto:karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Chris Ray, at 701.231.7417 or [chris.ray@ndsu.edu](mailto:chris.ray@ndsu.edu).

**What are my rights as a research participant?** You have rights as a participant in research. If you have questions about the rights of human participants in research or to report a problem, you may contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program at 701.231.8995, toll-free at 855.800.6717, or via email at [ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu](mailto:ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu).

***I understand that clicking to continue, below, constitutes my informed consent to participate in this study.***

Thank you for your willingness to participate in this study. In order to meet the criteria to participate, you must verify that you have at least 1 year of experience working in higher-education assessment and at least a portion of your responsibility is or was dedicated to providing direct support and collaboration for assessment with student-affairs professionals.

Do you have at least 1 year of experience working in higher-education assessment?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

Has at least a portion of your current or past responsibility been dedicated to providing direct support and collaboration for assessment with student-affairs professionals?

- Yes (1)
- No (2)

## **DEMOGRAPHICS**

In order to better understand your expertise in assessment, please answer the following questions about your professional experience and your current institution.

Is your institution public or private?

- Public (1)
- Private (2)

Is your institution 2-year or 4-year?

- 2-year (1)
- 4-year (2)

What is the size of your institution?

- Large (more than 10,000 students) (1)
- Medium (3,000-9,999 students) (2)
- Small (1,000-2,999 students) (3)
- Very small (fewer than 1,000 students) (4)

What is your institution's Carnegie Classification?

- Doctoral University (1)
- Master's College or University (2)
- Baccalaureate College (3)
- Associate's College (4)
- Special Focus Institution (5)
- Tribal College (6)
- Other type of institution (please specify) (7) \_\_\_\_\_

Please select all the titles and/or roles that apply to you:

- Senior-Level Administrator (1)
- Director (2)
- Assistant/Associate Director (3)
- Coordinator (4)
- Faculty Member (5)
- Other (6) \_\_\_\_\_

Of the following, select the items that are included in your responsibilities:

- Conduct institutional assessment (1)
- Coordinate institutional assessment with others (2)
- Conduct student affairs assessment (3)
- Coordinate student affairs assessment with others (4)
- Provide assessment training and development (5)
- Oversee institutional accreditation process (6)
- Facilitate strategic planning (7)

What percentage of your work currently involves working with student affairs professionals on assessment?

- Less than 25% (1)
- 25-49% (2)
- 50-74% (3)
- 75-100% (4)

Please indicate to whom you directly report:

- President/Chancellor (1)
- Provost/Senior Academic Affairs Administrator (2)
- Senior Student Affairs Administrator (3)
- Department Head/Director (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) \_\_\_\_\_

In which region of the United States is your institution primarily located?

- Midwest - IA, IL, IN, KS, MI, MN, MO, ND, NE, OH, SD, WI (1)
- Northeast - CT, DC, DE, MA, MD, ME, NH, NJ, NY, PA, RI, VT (2)
- Southeast - AL, AR, FL, GA, KY, LA, MS, NC, SC, TN, VA, WV (3)
- West - AK, CA, CO, HI, ID, MT, NV, OR, UT, WA, WY (4)
- Southwest - AZ, NM, OK, TX (5)
- My institution is located outside the United States (6)

What is your highest level of education completed?

- Doctoral degree (e.g., PhD, EdD) (1)
- Professional degree (e.g., MBA, J.D.) (2)
- Master's degree (3)
- Bachelor's/undergraduate degree (4)
- Other (please specify) (5) \_\_\_\_\_

How many years have you worked professionally in higher education?

How many years have you worked professionally in higher-education assessment?

How many years have you worked professionally in student-affairs assessment?

How many years have you been in your current position?

### **DEFINITIONS OF TERMS**

The terms assessment, student-affairs professional, and dispositions have been defined as follows for the context of this study. These will be repeated on each page for your reference.

- **Assessment** is a gathering of information about a particular program or group of programs in order to improve that program or programs while contributing to student development and learning.
- A **Student-Affairs Professional** is an individual who is trained to carry out student-affairs functions and programs. The student-affairs professionals referred to specifically in this study are people who serve in practitioner roles, actively engaged in the delivery of student-affairs programs and services.
- **Dispositions** are the attitudes, beliefs, and values that precipitate habits of behavior or action. A synonym for disposition is the term mindset.



## **DISPOSITION QUALITIES**

The items listed in the following sections have been identified by a small sample of assessment experts as qualities that would most effectively help student-affairs professionals integrate assessment into their practice. Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement. There is also a box below each group of statements if you would like to comment on any items in that group.

**Question Block 1**

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
1a	Believe assessment is for more than accreditation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1b	Believe the purpose of assessment is for improvement of programs and/or services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1c	Believe assessment can help with decision making	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
1d	Believe assessment is useful for obtaining resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

## **Question Block 2**

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2a	Believe their own talents can be developed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2b	Value focusing on strengths rather than limitations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2c	Are inquisitive learners	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2d	Are intellectually curious	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2e	Value the process of learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2f	Value innovation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 3**

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3a	Have a positive attitude toward assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3b	Enjoy doing assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3c	See assessment as an integral part of their job responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3d	Are intrinsically motivated to do assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3e	Are willing to put resources towards assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3f	Value feedback	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3g	Value self-improvement	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3h	Are committed to asking questions about the effectiveness of their work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

### **Question Block 4**

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4a	Feel competent enough to do assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4b	Feel empowered to do assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4c	Believe assessment is worth their time	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4d	Are open to assessment regardless of the results	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4e	Believe assessment results will not be used against them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4f	Do not take assessment results personally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 5**

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5a	Value collaboration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5b	Are interested in working with others to gain assessment knowledge and/or skills they may not already have	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5c	Are interested in building relationships to make assessment successful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5d	Value engagement in professional dialogues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5e	Value working with others across the institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 6**

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6a	Believe in the importance of the assessment cycle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6b	Value reflective practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6c	Believe assessment must be well thought-out, but not overly complex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6d	Believe that theory should be incorporated into assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6e	Want to do a good job with assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6f	Want to learn more about assessment by doing assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 7**

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7a	Value their role as an educator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7b	Believe assessment is critical to facilitating student success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7c	Believe assessment is an avenue to enhance student learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7d	Believe learning takes place in and out of the classroom	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7e	Are interested in exploring the impact of interventions on student learning and development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7f	Are interested in understanding the effects of programs and services	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?



### **Question Block 8**

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8a	Are interested in learning about the student-affairs profession	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8b	Believe assessment is critical to the success of student affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8c	Believe assessment is a best practice in student affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8d	Believe assessment helps tell the story of student affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8e	Believe student affairs work impacts student learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8f	Are motivated to demonstrate the role student affairs plays in student learning	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

## DISPOSITION DEVELOPMENT

The items listed in the following sections have been identified by a small sample of assessment experts as ways student-affairs professionals may develop an assessment disposition. Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement. There is also a box below each group of statements if you would like to comment on any items in that group.

### Question Block 9

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9a	They have high levels of accountability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9b	They are expected to meet accreditation standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9c	They feel a need to demonstrate the value of their work to others	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9d	Assessment work is expected for more than accountability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9e	Assessment is not simply an “add-on” to their work responsibilities	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9f	Assessment is part of their performance reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 10**

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
10a	They see examples of assessment that demonstrate it is not overly complicated and/or difficult	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10b	They recognize they are already doing assessment, even if it's less formal	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10c	They can see concrete examples of assessment projects	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
10d	They have access to help with their assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 11**

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
11a	They have opportunities to engage in assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11b	They engage in assessment work that is meaningful to them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11c	They engage in assessment work that is valuable to them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11d	Their assessment work involves more than just gathering data	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11e	They experience small victories around assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11f	They engage frequently in conversations about assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
11g	Assessment is embedded into their practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 12**

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12a	They are around others who have an assessment disposition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12b	They have mentors who model an assessment disposition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12c	They build relationships with others who have an assessment disposition	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12d	They are placed in assessment work groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12e	They see others using assessment meaningfully	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12f	They are involved in professional associations that foster a broader perspective about assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 13**

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
13a	Their institutional infrastructure supports assessment practice	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13b	Discussion about assessment is incorporated into meetings	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13d	Assessment is integrated into processes (e.g., annual reports, strategic planning)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13e	They feel supported to engage in assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13f	They are encouraged to engage in assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13g	They are rewarded for doing assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
13h	They are recognized for their assessment work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 14**

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14a	Assessment work is fun for them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14b	They experience self-satisfaction from their assessment work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14c	They utilize assessment to demonstrate the value of their work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14d	Assessment is a tool that helps them obtain resources	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14e	Assessment projects are clearly aligned with other parts of their work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14f	They associate assessment as an integral part of the institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 15**

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15a	Student learning is a priority in their work	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15b	They can see how assessment helps students	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15c	They associate assessment with helping students succeed	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15d	They have training on how students learn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
15e	They know how to gather evidence to measure student outcomes	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

**Question Block 16**

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
16a	Assessment training is part of their formal education	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16b	Assessment training is part of their professional development	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16c	Their supervisor supports opportunities for assessment training	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16d	Assessment training is congruent with their level of assessment experience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16e	They have learned simple assessment techniques	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16f	They have increased their assessment knowledge	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
16g	They have developed assessment skills	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these qualities?

### **CONTACT INFORMATION**

Finally, please provide your contact information below so I may contact you for the next round of the Delphi study.

Name:

Email:

## APPENDIX I. ROUND-TWO SURVEY INVITATION

Subject: Student-Affairs Assessment Disposition—Research Invitation

Dear Higher Education Colleague:

Thank you for your participation in my research study regarding student-affairs professionals and assessment disposition. The second survey of this Delphi study is now available via the link below. Please complete the survey by **Friday, July 22, 2016**. The survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Of the 95 statements in the first survey, 66 reached statistical consensus among the panelists. The 29 statements that did not reach consensus are included in this second survey. For your consideration, I have incorporated a summary of results and comments from participants that pertain to the remaining statements.

As a reminder, I am conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Chris Ray and with approval from the North Dakota State University Institutional Review Board. Further information regarding the study is included on the Informed Consent located on the first page of the survey.

Thank you for your input! Your time and opinions are valued and appreciated.  
Sincerely,

Karla Thoennes  
Doctoral Candidate, North Dakota State University  
karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu  
701-799-0473

**Follow this link to the Survey:**

[\\${1://SurveyLink?d=Take the survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[\\${1://SurveyURL}](#)

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[\\${1://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

## APPENDIX J. ROUND-TWO SURVEY

**NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY**  
**Education Doctoral Program**  
**School of Education**

### REMINDER OF DELPHI SURVEY PROTOCOL CONSENT FORM

**Title of Research Study:** Assessment Disposition: Qualities and Strategies for Development in Student-Affairs Professionals

**This study is being conducted by:** Karla Thoennes, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education, under the direction of faculty adviser Dr. Chris Ray.

**Why am I being asked to take part in this research study?** You have been identified as an expert in the field of student-affairs assessment and are invited to participate in this research study. Please read the following document and ask any questions before you agree to participate in the study.

**What is the purpose of the study?** The purpose of this study is to determine the defining qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition that would more effectively help student-affairs professionals integrate assessment into their practice. A second purpose is to explore the ways that this disposition can be developed by student-affairs professionals.

**What is the time commitment and timeline of the study?** It is anticipated that this study will consist of three iterations of surveys administered online via Qualtrics survey software. Each survey should take about 30 minutes to complete. The second round survey is open now and will remain open until July 22, 2016. It is anticipated that the final round for this study will be completed by August 15, 2016.

**How do I qualify to participate?** In order to meet the criteria to participate in the study, you must verify that you have at least 1 year of experience working in higher-education assessment and at least a portion of your responsibility is or was dedicated to providing direct support and collaboration for assessment with student-affairs professionals.

**Do I have to take part in the study?** Your participation is voluntary, and you may change your mind or quit participating at any time with no penalty; however, your assistance would be greatly appreciated in making this study meaningful.

**What will I be asked to do?** You will be part of a Delphi study to express your opinions and ideas concerning the assessment disposition of student-affairs professionals. It is anticipated that this study will be completed in three survey rounds. During each round, you will be asked to respond to topic statements using a Likert-type scale for levels of agreement and

importance. You will also have the opportunity to include comments and suggestions for future topic statements.

**Who will have access to the information I provide?** Only the researcher and faculty adviser will have access to the responses. All responses from the surveys will be kept strictly confidential, and names will not be linked to individual responses. The data will be reported as grouped data in the final report. If you choose to participate, your name and institutional information will be listed as one of the expert panelists along with others who choose to participate in the study.

**What are the potential risks?** Please keep in mind that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but reasonable precautions have been taken to minimize any known risks. No monetary compensation will be provided for your participation.

**Who do I contact if I have questions or concerns?** If you have any questions about this study, please contact Karla Thoennes at 701.799.0473 or [karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu](mailto:karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Chris Ray, at 701.231.7417 or [chris.ray@ndsu.edu](mailto:chris.ray@ndsu.edu).

**What are my rights as a research participant?** You have rights as a participant in research. If you have questions about the rights of human participants in research or to report a problem, you may contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program at 701.231.8995, toll-free at 855.800.6717, or via email at [ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu](mailto:ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu).

*I understand that clicking to continue, below, constitutes my informed consent to continue participation in this study.*

## DISPOSITION QUALITIES--SURVEY 2

Of the 47 statements in the first Delphi survey pertaining to the qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition, 26 statements reached statistical consensus among the panel participants. The 21 statements that did not reach consensus are summarized in the sections to follow. Each summary includes the percentages of agreement (strongly agree and agree), uncertainty, and disagreement (strongly disagree and disagree). Comments from participants that pertain to the remaining statements have also been included to represent various opinions and to allow you the opportunity to reflect on the opinions of other panel experts and determine your current level of agreement.

As a reminder, the terms assessment, student-affairs professional, and dispositions have been defined as follows for the context of this study.

- **Assessment** is a gathering of information about a particular program or group of programs in order to improve that program or programs while contributing to student development and learning.
- A **Student-Affairs Professional** is an individual who is trained to carry out student-affairs functions and programs. The student-affairs professionals referred to specifically in this study are people who serve in practitioner roles, actively engaged in the delivery of student-affairs programs and services.
- **Dispositions** are the attitudes, beliefs, and values that precipitate habits of behavior or action. A synonym for disposition is the term mindset.

### Question Block 2

#### Survey 1 Results:

<b>Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...</b>	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
Value focusing on strengths rather than limitations	58.62%	41.38%	0.00%
Value innovation	79.31%	20.69%	0.00%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these statements:

*With respect to "value focusing on strengths rather than limitations" my response depends on how you interpret this item. There is nothing inherently wrong with focusing on limitations given that assessment results may be used to identify aspects of a program that need to be improved. However, if they are focusing on their personal strengths rather than limitations then I would "agree" that this is important.*

*It is necessary to discuss limitations to make sure that we're basing decisions on good data. On this set of dispositions, I agree but not strongly. I have known staff over the years who effectively integrate assessment into their practice and demonstrate these dispositions in widely varying levels. Yes, they do focus on strengths, but they also attend*



*to limitations; their focus is a balance of strengths and limitations where more attention goes to strengths while also being mindful of limits.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.

Notice that an additional question appears in this block of questions. This new question is presented as a variation, based on comments from one or more participants during the first Delphi survey.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2b	Value focusing on strengths rather than limitations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2g	Value focusing on both program strengths and limitations (new question)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2f	Value innovation	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

### Question Block 3

#### Survey 1 Results:

<b>Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...</b>	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
Enjoy doing assessment	65.52%	27.59%	6.90%
Are intrinsically motivated to do assessment	68.97%	17.24%	13.79%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*I have had staff I work with tell me they now love assessment - I believe it is because of my positive attitude and desire for others to grow professionally.*

*Some people who are interested in assessment are not responsible for assessment. By getting involved in assessment and connecting with others, they can find ways to contribute to assessment and/or add it as one of their job responsibilities.*

*I generally agree with these statements, but you can effectively integrate without demonstrating these qualities or having these dispositions. Sometimes you effectively integrate assessment out of external conditions (i.e. VPSA tells you you must or President is driven by data) but you don't necessarily integrate in ways that are personally or professionally enhancing (or at least may not see that as a goal but it might happen).*

*In my experience, folks either love or hate assessment. They value it and want to incorporate it because it is helpful to their practice, or it is a monstrous burden that they do because they're told to do so.*

*While a positive attitude toward assessment is helpful, it is not strongly required. Staff can effectively incorporate assessment into practice without enjoying assessment or feeling an intrinsic motivation to do it. Their assessment can still be effective; they just don't enjoy it and will never do it without it being a requirement or being "incentivized." The best predictors I have observed for effective assessment practice are seeing it (and understanding it) as an integral duty/responsibility that allows them to understand how well they are serving their students.*

*Staff who do assessment well usually enjoy the process as well as the information they get back.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3b	Enjoy doing assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3d	Are intrinsically motivated to do assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

**Question Block 4**

**Survey 1 Results:**

<b>Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...</b>	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
Value collaboration	75.87%	24.14%	0.00%
Are interested in building relationships to make assessment successful	55.17%	44.83%	0.00%
Value engagement in professional dialogues	72.42%	24.14%	3.45%
Value working with others across the institution	58.62%	34.48%	6.90%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these statements:

*In my experience student affairs professionals are committed to program improvement, but often do not feel competent and empowered. They frequently must find common ground with a trained assessment professional before they learn not to take assessment results personally.*

*I do not know what is meant by feeling empowered to do assessment. How is this different from competent? With respect to the other questions, it is easy for student-affairs professionals to equate their sense of "self" with the outcomes of a specific program. Some separation is needed from the results...*

*Sometimes the feeling of competence comes after doing assessment for a while -- and after figuring out how to effectively integrate it into practice. I'm not sure it's a front-end only factor. And, sometimes, even those who do effectively integrate assessment still have to work not to take it personally.*

*Graduate student training in Student Affairs assessment is not as strong it should be. More experienced staff were not trained in assessment during graduate school. It is*

*not as important that they be competent enough to do assessment but that they have someone who can guide them through the process and teach them. Their assessments will get better over time and the graduate training in assessment will also improve over time.*

*Folks may not feel empowered to do assessment based, in part, on institutional culture. If there isn't a strong culture, folks may not do it... or they do it because they know its value, believe it to be worth their time, etc. I have colleagues who believe assessment data have been used to target individuals. This was based on happenings before my arrival in the role, though.*

*Feelings of competence to do assessment, in my experience, are strongly related to one's confidence that what they are doing to understand how well their programs serve students is actually assessment. Sometimes, the label "assessment" throws them. They use other language, and with that alternate lexicon, they reveal that they have competence in what the rest of us call "assessment." For example, they say that they discern the needs of their students (e.g., by combining what they learned about their students from individual interviews, advisory boards, and reviewing the questions that their offices receive each term) and check to make sure that students got what they needed or that they know that the program worked because they observed changes X, Y, and Z. Their efforts might occasionally need some polish. With a little nudge here or there to strengthen their methods and help them document more clearly what they do, their confidence soars. And then, there are those rare exceptions who seem impervious to encouragement, instruction, or expectations--but they are not effectively integrating assessment anyway. Some of the staff whom I have known to incorporate assessment effectively carry with them a powerful existential fear of assessment. They fear the results may be used against them, and because their work is usually a reflection of their professional identity (rooted in their personal identity), they do take the results personally. The distinction between staff who are paralyzed by that fear and the staff who are not is twofold: how long they dwell on the fear and how courageously they reflect upon and examine the results.*

*We still have a majority of staff, including those that are effective at integrating assessment, that are protective of their program results and take them personally.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4a	Feel competent enough to do assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4b	Feel empowered to do assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4d	Are open to assessment regardless of the results	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4e	Believe assessment results will not be used against them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4f	Do not take assessment results personally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

## **Question Block 5**

Survey 1 Results:

<b>Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...</b>	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
Want to learn more about assessment by doing assessment	68.97%	24.14%	6.90%
Believe that theory should be incorporated into assessment	41.37%	34.48%	24.14%
Believe in the importance of the assessment cycle	75.86%	24.14%	0.00%
Believe assessment must be well thought-out, but not overly complex	75.87%	17.24%	6.90%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*Assessment is a collaborative process. The more perspectives and support one has for an assessment, the better the instrument is and the more the results are used to make change.*

*Again, with this set I have a dilemma. I think people with these goals/values are more successful but not all of them may be necessary to integrate assessment into one's work.*

*I think if you are competent and confident enough to integrate assessment into your work, you likely do other things that demonstrate a high level of competence such as collaborate with others. Those who effectively integrate assessment are likely just good professionals, period.*

*I hope all of these things are true!*

*With a strong interest in collaborating for the success of their students, staff often gain assessment competencies, engage in dialogues, and work with many other staff across the institution. The driver here, I believe, is the collaborative attitude toward their work.*

*Assessment can, and should, be a very collaborative effort including working with a variety of stakeholders and including students in the whole process.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5a	Value collaboration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5c	Are interested in building relationships to make assessment successful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5d	Value engagement in professional dialogues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5e	Value working with others across the institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

## **Question Block 6**

Survey 1 Results:

<b>Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...</b>	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
Value their role as an educator	72.42%	24.14%	3.45%
Believe assessment is critical to facilitating student success	75.86%	13.79%	10.34%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*Most folks don't understand the importance of a good theory; even those who have a personal mission statement dealing with student development!*

*Ad hoc assessments are necessary and aren't always on an assessment cycle.*

*I can't disagree with these statements but find that there might be great variance across those who may demonstrate effective integration and their understanding and belief of philosophies around assessment.*

*The staff who are best at assessment do indeed think it through, plan it carefully based upon the guidance of a theory (which also guided the development of the program or service), and manage to avoid making the method or analysis complex. I remind staff that the best assessment is a KISS: Keep it simple and straightforward. Even the best staff can fall into the rabbit hole of "would it be good to know X" or "oh but what if there are differences based upon Y." They can usually catch themselves and stay focused on the goals and outcomes of the program or service: what do you NEED to know? It does seem challenging, though, to reconnect them with the theory behind the program/service and ask them to extrapolate from that base what the assessment should be. This gap might be a training issue which could be addressed better in the master's programs in higher education administration.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.



Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6f	Want to learn more about assessment by doing assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6d	Believe that theory should be incorporated into assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6a	Believe in the importance of the assessment cycle	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
6c	Believe assessment must be well thought-out, but not overly complex	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

## **Question Block 7**

Survey 1 Results:

<b>Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...</b>	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
Are interested in learning about the student-affairs profession	48.27%	44.83%	6.90%
Believe assessment is critical to the success of student affairs	68.96%	24.14%	6.90%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these statements:

*In my experience a very high proportion of student affairs professionals are reluctant to claim a status as educators. The divide between faculty & staff in status is often huge and intimidating.*

*Not all professionals are involved in student learning and development. Some are involved in facilities, budgets, human resources, etc. and design assessments around those areas.*

*Viewing themselves as educators seems critical to this cluster of items. I am uncertain whether staff who effectively integrate assessment into practice actually believe assessment to be critical in facilitating student success. Rather, I think these staff see assessment as helpful in facilitating student success, but I'm not sure that they themselves would use the word "critical."*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.

Notice that an additional question appears in this block of questions. This new question is presented as a variation, based on comments from one or more participants during the first Delphi survey.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7a	Value their role as an educator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7b	Believe assessment is critical to facilitating student success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7g	Believe assessment is helpful in facilitating student success (new question)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

**Question Block 8**

Survey 1 results:

**Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...**

	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
Are interested in learning about the student-affairs profession	48.27%	44.83%	6.90%
Believe assessment is critical to the success of student affairs	68.96%	24.14%	6.90%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*The fact that student affairs professionals believe assessment is critical to the success of the field, I believe, is tied largely to assessment results yielding more money/resource.*

*Our assessment efforts here have been very much tied to student learning and telling the student affairs story of contribution, so I think this would be a way to accurately describe student affairs professionals here who are good at integrating assessment. I think that*

*many, even those who are good at it, would not directly correlate assessment and critical to success of student affairs.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8a	Are interested in learning about the student-affairs profession	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8b	Believe assessment is critical to the success of student affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

## **DISPOSITION DEVELOPMENT--SURVEY 2**

Of the 48 statements in the first Delphi survey pertaining to ways student-affairs professionals can develop an assessment disposition, 40 statements reached statistical consensus among the panel participants. The 8 statements that did not reach consensus are summarized in the sections to follow. Each summary includes the percentages of agreement (strongly agree and agree), uncertainty, and disagreement (strongly disagree and disagree). Comments from participants that pertain to the remaining statements have also been included to represent various opinions

and to allow you the opportunity to reflect on the opinions of other panel experts and determine your current level of agreement.

As a reminder, the terms assessment, student-affairs professional, and dispositions have been defined as follows for the context of this study.

- **Assessment** is a gathering of information about a particular program or group of programs in order to improve that program or programs while contributing to student development and learning.
- A **Student-Affairs Professional** is an individual who is trained to carry out student-affairs functions and programs. The student-affairs professionals referred to specifically in this study are people who serve in practitioner roles, actively engaged in the delivery of student-affairs programs and services.
- **Dispositions** are the attitudes, beliefs, and values that precipitate habits of behavior or action. A synonym for disposition is the term mindset.

### Question Block 9

#### **Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...**

	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
They have high levels of accountability	72.42%	24.14%	3.45%
They are expected to meet accreditation standards	41.38%	34.48%	24.14%
Assessment is part of their performance reviews	75.86%	17.24%	6.90%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these statements:

*In my opinion the first two items (They have high levels of accountability and They are expected to meet accreditation standards) and the final one (Assessment is part of their performance reviews) are more likely to induce resistance or resentment than to produce a disposition towards willingly and effectively engaging in assessment.*

*Though these may be used to develop an assessment disposition, such a disposition is more valuable when it is not motivated by external demands. I think those items that can be perceived as "punitive" (or potentially so) (e.g., accreditation / performance reviews, etc.) are not necessarily going to contribute to the development of a student affairs assessment disposition.*

*"High levels of accountability" doesn't always make someone interested in assessment or developing assessment skills. It can be counterproductive to encouraging their curiosity and critical thinking. The Student Affairs professionals at my university are pretty far removed from accreditation. Their need to demonstrate the value of their work often overrides the need to develop an assessment disposition. In other words, sometimes they don't want to develop assessment skills but instead find someone who can do the work for them in order to demonstrate the value of their work. Assessment is not for*

everyone. Not all professional staff are detail-oriented, have the skill set to do assessment, or have the interest in learning to do assessment. That's okay. Their strengths lie elsewhere and benefit the student experience in other ways.

*In order to change the culture of the organization and change the disposition of staff, it is important to add assessment to performance reviews and annual reports.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9a	They have high levels of accountability	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9b	They are expected to meet accreditation standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
9f	Assessment is part of their performance reviews	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

### **Question Block 12**

**Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...**

	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
They are placed in assessment work groups	65.52%	31.03%	3.45%
They are involved in professional associations that foster a broader perspective about assessment	72.41%	24.14%	3.45%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*Professional groups often have special-interest areas which some members buy into and others do not find valuable. The professional assoc. is thus a good place to highlight good work [that] may grab their attention or not. It's a little hit or miss as to whether it*

would foster a disposition to do assessment. And even more hit or miss as to whether than assessment would be "effective."

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12d	They are placed in assessment work groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12f	They are involved in professional associations that foster a broader perspective about assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

### **Question Block 14**

**Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...**

Assessment work is fun for them

They associate assessment as an integral part of the institution

Agree    Uncertain    Disagree

58.62%    31.03%    10.34%

72.42%    20.69%    6.90%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these statements:

*It's very easy, at least at a large institution, to be in philosophical opposition to something that upper administration thinks is "integral" to the institution.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14a	Assessment work is fun for them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
14f	They associate assessment as an integral part of the institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

### **Question Block 15**

**Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...**

They have training on how students learn

Agree    Uncertain    Disagree  
58.62%    31.03%    10.34%

Summary of participant comments from round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*Not all student affairs professionals are involved in student programs. I'm not sure if training on how students learn leads to a stronger assessment disposition. It may lead to changes in programs and services but might not lead to an assessment.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the statement below. There is also a text box if you would like to provide any additional comments you feel would be important for other panelists to consider in the next round, should consensus for individual items not be reached.

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15d	They have training on how students learn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>



What comments, if any, do you have regarding this statement?

**OTHER COMMENTS**

Please provide any additional comments you believe the panel should consider during the next survey round or any general comments about the qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition and ways to develop this disposition.

## **APPENDIX K. ROUND-THREE SURVEY INVITATION**

Subject: Student-Affairs Assessment Disposition-Survey 3

Dear Delphi Study Participant:

Thank you for your continued participation in this study regarding student-affairs professionals and assessment disposition. I believe your participation is contributing to what I hope will be meaningful research for our profession.

The third and final survey of this Delphi study is now available via the link below. Please complete the survey by Monday, September 5, 2016. I recognize that it may be a busy time for many as the academic year gets underway, so I have allowed additional days for completing this final survey. As with the others, the survey should take approximately 30 minutes to complete.

Of the 31 statements in Survey 2, 12 reached statistical consensus among the panelists. The 19 statements that did not reach consensus are included in Survey 3. For your consideration, I have incorporated a summary of results and comments from participants that pertain to the remaining statements.

As a reminder, I am conducting this study under the supervision of Dr. Chris Ray and with approval from the North Dakota State University Institutional Review Board. Further information regarding the study is included on the Informed Consent located on the first page of the survey.

Thank you for your input! Your time and opinions are valued and appreciated.

Sincerely,

Karla Thoennes  
Doctoral Candidate, North Dakota State University  
karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu  
701-799-0473

Follow this link to the Survey:

[\\${l://SurveyLink?d=Take the survey}](#)

Or copy and paste the URL below into your internet browser:

[\\${l://SurveyURL}](#)

Follow the link to opt out of future emails:

[\\${l://OptOutLink?d=Click here to unsubscribe}](#)

## APPENDIX L. ROUND-THREE SURVEY

NORTH DAKOTA STATE UNIVERSITY  
Education Doctoral Program  
School of Education

### SURVEY 3

#### REMINDER OF DELPHI SURVEY PROTOCOL CONSENT FORM

Title of Research Study: Assessment Disposition: Qualities and Strategies for Development in Student-Affairs Professionals

This study is being conducted by: Karla Thoennes, a doctoral candidate in the School of Education, under the direction of faculty adviser Dr. Chris Ray.

Why am I being asked to take part in this research study? You have been identified as an expert in the field of student-affairs assessment and are invited to participate in this research study. Please read the following document and ask any questions before you agree to participate in the study.

What is the purpose of the study? The purpose of this study is to determine the defining qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition that would more effectively help student-affairs professionals integrate assessment into their practice. A second purpose is to explore the ways that this disposition can be developed by student-affairs professionals.

What is the time commitment and timeline of the study? It is anticipated that this study will consist of three iterations of surveys administered online via Qualtrics survey software. Each survey should take about 30 minutes to complete. This final round survey is open now and will remain open until September 5, 2016.

How do I qualify to participate? In order to meet the criteria to participate in the study, you must verify that you have at least 1 year of experience working in higher-education assessment and at least a portion of your responsibility is or was dedicated to providing direct support and collaboration for assessment with student-affairs professionals.

Do I have to take part in the study? Your participation is voluntary, and you may change your mind or quit participating at any time with no penalty; however, your assistance would be greatly appreciated in making this study meaningful.

What will I be asked to do? You will be part of a Delphi study to express your opinions and ideas concerning the assessment disposition of student-affairs professionals. It is anticipated that this study will be completed in three survey rounds. During each round, you will be asked to respond to topic statements using a Likert-type scale for levels of agreement and importance.

You will also have the opportunity to include comments and suggestions for future topic statements.

Who will have access to the information I provide? Only the researcher and faculty adviser will have access to the responses. All responses from the surveys will be kept strictly confidential, and names will not be linked to individual responses. The data will be reported as grouped data in the final report. If you choose to participate, your name and institutional information will be listed as one of the expert panelists along with others who choose to participate in the study.

What are the potential risks? Please keep in mind that it is not possible to identify all potential risks in research procedures, but reasonable precautions have been taken to minimize any known risks. No monetary compensation will be provided for your participation.

Who do I contact if I have questions or concerns? If you have any questions about this study, please contact Karla Thoennes at 701.799.0473 or [karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu](mailto:karla.thoennes@ndsu.edu). You may also contact Dr. Chris Ray, at 701.231.7417 or [chris.ray@ndsu.edu](mailto:chris.ray@ndsu.edu).

What are my rights as a research participant? You have rights as a participant in research. If you have questions about the rights of human participants in research or to report a problem, you may contact the NDSU Human Research Protection Program at 701.231.8995, toll-free at 855.800.6717, or via email at [ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu](mailto:ndsu.irb@ndsu.edu).

I understand that clicking to continue, below, constitutes my informed consent to continue participation in this study.

## DISPOSITION QUALITIES--SURVEY 3

The Delphi Survey 2 included 23 statements regarding qualities of a student affairs assessment disposition, including 2 statements that were offered as variations to original statements and based on panelists' comments. The 14 statements that did not reach consensus in Round 2 are summarized in the sections to follow. Each summary includes the percentages of agreement (strongly agree and agree), uncertainty, and disagreement (strongly disagree and disagree). Comments from participants that pertain to the remaining statements have also been included to represent various opinions and to allow you the opportunity to reflect on the opinions of other panel experts and determine your current level of agreement.

As a reminder, the terms assessment, student-affairs professional, and dispositions have been defined as follows for the context of this study.

**Assessment** is a gathering of information about a particular program or group of programs in order to improve that program or programs while contributing to student development and learning.

A **Student-Affairs Professional** is an individual who is trained to carry out student-affairs functions and programs. The student-affairs professionals referred to specifically in this study are people who serve in practitioner roles, actively engaged in the delivery of student-affairs programs and services.

**Dispositions** are the attitudes, beliefs, and values that precipitate habits of behavior or action. A synonym for disposition is the term mindset.

## Question Block 2

Previous Results:

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Value focusing on strengths rather than limitations

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	58.62%	41.38%	0.00%
2	55.00%	30.00%	15.00%

*Note.* The variation statement in the Round 2 survey, “Value focusing on both program strengths and limitations” reached a statistical level of consensus of agreement among members of the panel. However, based on comments from Rounds 1 and 2, a third variation is offered in this Round 3 survey for your consideration.

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding this quality:

*I don't know if the term "value" is necessary. I think student affairs assessment coordinators will typically find less resistance to assessment if they focus on strengths rather than limitations and I do know student affairs professionals who will get sidetracked by the limitation details if they focus on them too much.*

*I think the consideration for balancing of strengths AND limitations is important to healthy assessment. I think the second statement does most accurately get at the disposition one must have to be successful. You have to be willing to look at limitations - but, you also must remember to identify and celebrate strengths. It's a delicate but critical balance that must be made.*

*Neither the original strengths item and the new strengths item address the crucial issue of balance. I would agree if not strongly agree that professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice value focusing on strengths MORE THAN limitations, but I am not sure they focus on one rather than the other (which sounds like they ignore the other) --or that they focus on both, which sounds like they weigh them equally.*

*I believe that assessment is rooted in focusing on both positives and negatives. If a program has limitations, we have to acknowledge those while emphasizing the strengths. I believe the notion of focusing on strengths is better suited to individuals rather than programs. So, if the first question is about how we train, I'm uncertain because I think it truly matters on the individuals involved. Sometimes, we have to focus on the limitations*

*that people bring to the assessment world. Otherwise, we'll just keep doing what people have always done.*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding this quality:

*With respect to "value focusing on strengths rather than limitations" my response depends on how you interpret this item. There is nothing inherently wrong with focusing on limitations given that assessment results may be used to identify aspects of a program that need to be improved. However, if they are focusing on their personal strengths rather than limitations then I would "agree" that this is important.*

*It is necessary to discuss limitations to make sure that we're basing decision on good data.*

*On this set of dispositions, I agree but not strongly. Yes, they do focus on strengths, but they also attend to limitations; their focus is a balance of strengths and limitations where more attention goes to strengths while also being mindful of limits. In general, they do exhibit at least some inquisitiveness and curiosity, but I have not found them to exhibit these qualities at levels that an assessment professional or research faculty member might.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
2b	Value focusing on strengths rather than limitations	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
2h	Believe that considering strengths of a program or initiative is important as well as focusing on limitations. (new question)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?



### Question Block 3

#### Previous Results

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

#### Enjoy doing assessment

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	65.52%	27.59%	6.90%
2	70.00%	20.00%	10.00%

#### Are intrinsically motivated to do assessment

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	68.97%	17.24%	13.79%
2	65.00%	20.00%	15.00%

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding these qualities:

*Level of enjoyment and motivation vary day-by-day and project-by-project; however, enjoying assessment and being intrinsically motivated to do assessment increases the chances that it will be effectively integrated.*

*In general I have found student affairs professionals fearful of assessment. There are some who can learn to be motivated by the rewards of assessment & enjoy it. I believe they are the ones with either high curiosity; a high drive to "be the best" or a strong data orientation. This does not necessarily mean they "enjoy" doing assessment, if by assessment you mean collecting and analyzing data--for that they may need a high level of technical support; but they enjoy learning about their students' outcomes.*

*I think you can effectively integrate assessment without enjoying it or being intrinsically motivated; however, those who often integrate assessment BEST either enjoy it or are intrinsically motivated. I agree with a previous panelist's comment that "seeing it (and understanding it) as an integral duty/responsibility" seems to be the more important than either enjoying or being intrinsically motivated -- I think this is where you can have folks who successfully integrate even if it isn't their preferred activity.*

*I understand the arguments above.... but, ultimately, those who \*effectively\* integrate it into their practice see its value -- and, for those reasons, may enjoy doing it or become intrinsically motivated to do so.*

*I think it is easier to integrate assessment into your practice if you like & care about it, but can still be done without those factors.*

*While enjoyment and intrinsic motivation are nice, they are not necessary for professionals effectively to integrate assessment into their practice. The professionals who do not enjoy it and feel no intrinsic motivation to do it still can effectively integrate*

*assessment when they see it as integral to serving their students well. Assessment, for them, is a necessary chore--much like managing a departmental budget. When they understand assessment as vital to practicing with integrity (i.e., ensuring that students gain from their program or service what they intended for the student to gain), then they can find the motivation to conduct it and integrate it into their practice. They still do not enjoy "assessment" itself; they enjoy serving their students well.*

*I think many of the comments capture the issue. There are always going to be outliers, but those who are intrinsically motivated and love assessment are likely to be better at it. But there may be some cases where this isn't necessarily true, so I can't strongly agree.*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*I have had staff I work with tell me they now love assessment - I believe it is because of my positive attitude and desire for others to grow professionally.*

*I generally agree with these statements, but you can effectively integrate without demonstrating these qualities or having these dispositions. Sometimes you effectively integrate assessment out of external conditions (i.e. VPSA tells you that you must or President is driven by data) but you don't necessarily integrate in ways that are personally or professionally enhancing (or at least may not see that as a goal but it might happen).*

*In my experience, folks either love or hate assessment. They value it and want to incorporate it because it is helpful to their practice, or it is a monstrous burden that they do because they're told to do so.*

*While a positive attitude toward assessment is helpful, it is not strongly required. Staff can effectively incorporate assessment into practice without enjoying assessment or feeling an intrinsic motivation to do it. Their assessment can still be effective; they just don't enjoy it and will never do it without it being a requirement or being "incentivized."*

*Staff who do assessment well usually enjoy the process as well as the information they get back.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
3b	Enjoy doing assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
3d	Are intrinsically motivated to do assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

## Question Block 4

### Previous Results

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Believe assessment results will not be used against them

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	65.51%	20.69%	13.79%
2	70.00%	20.00%	10.00%

Do not take assessment results personally

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	68.97%	13.79%	17.24%
2	55.00%	30.00%	15.00%

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding these qualities:

*"Openness to assessment" is different from having a high trust that your boss or the university won't use it against you. I would say rather that the student affairs professional needs to have tolerance of ambiguity (since the outcomes might look bad) and feel professionally supported enough to believe "bad" outcomes will not be held against them.*

*Taking results personally can mean different things in a good or bad way. Doing so in a good way could imply healthy ownership of an outcome of interest. Doing so in a bad way could imply inappropriate attachment to a program, etc. Believing assessment results will not be used against them and feeling empowered to do assessment are both functions of campus and assessment leadership creating a safe environment in which staff can conduct assessment. Creating that safe environment is critical to folks effectively integrating assessment, because without doing so they are more likely to not participate, intentionally/unintentionally place the emphasize on only positive results, and/or willing to be open to failure. Not taking results personally seems more a function of personality than anything else -- this could take a lifetime to learn, some may and some may not. I tend to think that lots of people take assessment results personally. Staff get invested in their programs/services and they may not like seeing "negative" results ... or they may overemphasize the positive results they see. So, I don't recall what I answered last time, but I do think that even really strong professionals who do assessment well may take assessment results "personally."*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*They frequently must find common ground with a trained assessment professional before they learn not to take assessment results personally. It is easy for student-affairs professionals to equate their sense of "self" with the outcomes of a specific*

*program. Some separation is needed from the results... Sometimes even those who do effectively integrate assessment still have to work not to take it personally. I have colleagues who believe assessment data have been use to target individuals. This was based on happenings before my arrival in the role, though. Some of the staff whom I have known to incorporate assessment effectively carry with them a powerful existential fear of assessment. They fear the results may be used against them, and because their work is usually a reflection of their professional identity (rooted in their personal identity), they do take the results personally. The distinction between staff who are paralyzed by that fear and the staff who are not is twofold: how long they dwell on the fear and how courageously they reflect upon and examine the results.*

*We still have a majority of staff, including those that are effective at integrating assessment, that are protective of their program results and take them personally.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
4e	Believe assessment results will not be used against them	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
4f	Do not take assessment results personally	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

## Question Block 5

### Previous Results

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

#### Value collaboration

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	75.87%	24.14%	0.00%
2	75.00%	15.00%	10.00%

Are interested in building relationships to make assessment successful

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	55.17%	44.83%	0.00%
2	75.00%	20.00%	5.00%

Value engagement in professional dialogues

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	72.42%	24.14%	3.45%
2	75.00%	20.00%	5.00%

Value working with others across the institution

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	58.62%	34.48%	6.90%
2	60.00%	30.00%	10.00%

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding these qualities:

*Yes, all of these items help improve the implementation of assessment into practice but if you have strong assessment skills you can integrate assessment effectively without connecting to others. The chances of it being a great assessment are less likely but still possible.*

*Agree: "Again, with this set I have a dilemma. I think people with these goals/values are more successful but not all of them may be necessary to integrate assessment into one's work."*

*May not always be the case as sometimes people who like and are good at assessment are the ones who can put their heads down and get work done. That doesn't always happen in collaborations. I am inclined to think that those who are assessment focused or do it effectively are aware of big picture issues and want to improve to demonstrate contributions, so they are likely geared toward collaborations because you have to work*

*together to get things done and make people aware; however, I think assessment as a practice can be done quite well as a single person.*

*I agree with the comment that these dispositions are those of a good professional, period. The assessment aspect is just part of it.*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*Assessment is a collaborative process. The more perspectives and support one has for an assessment, the better the instrument is and the more the results are used to make change.*

*Again, with this set I have a dilemma. I think people with these goals/values are more successful but not all of them may be necessary to integrate assessment into one's work.*

*I think if you are competent and confident enough to integrate assessment into your work, you likely do other things that demonstrate a high level of competence such as collaborate with others. Those who effectively integrate assessment are likely just good professionals, period.*

*I hope all of these things are true!*

*With a strong interest in collaborating for the success of their students, staff often gain assessment competencies, engage in dialogues, and work with many other staff across the institution. The driver here, I believe, is the collaborative attitude toward their work.*

*Assessment can, and should, be a very collaborative effort including working with a variety of stakeholders and including students in the whole process.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
5a	Value collaboration	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5c	Are interested in building relationships to make assessment successful	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5d	Value engagement in professional dialogues	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
5e	Value working with others across the institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?



## Question Block 6

### Previous Results

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Believe that theory should be incorporated into assessment

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	41.37%	34.48%	24.14%
2	55.00%	35.00%	10.00%

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding this quality:

*The assessment professional probably cares about this; in my experience, the average student affairs professional, even one who willingly collaborates and is intrinsically motivated, does not care about theory of assessment. They care about meaningful data that illuminates a problem in the student outcomes or which lets them improve their programs & services.*

*Assessment is different from research in a number of ways, including the incorporation of theory. While it may be a best practice, I can be certain that at times, a simple assessment may not necessarily fall into using a particular theory.*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding this quality:

*Most folks don't understand the importance of a good theory; even those who have a personal mission statement dealing with student development!*

*The staff who are best at assessment do indeed think it through, plan it carefully based upon the guidance of a theory (which also guided the development of the program or service), and manage to avoid making the method or analysis complex. I remind staff that the best assessment is a KISS: Keep it simple and straightforward. Even the best staff can fall into the rabbit hole of "would it be good to know X" or "oh but what if there are differences based upon Y." They can usually catch themselves and stay focused on the goals and outcomes of the program or service: what do you NEED to know? It does seem challenging, though, to reconnect them with the theory behind the program/service and ask them to extrapolate from that base what the assessment should be. This gap might be a training issue which could be addressed better in the master's programs in higher education administration.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the statement below.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
6d	Believe that theory should be incorporated into assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding this statement?

## Question Block 7

### Previous Results

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Value their role as an educator

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	72.42%	24.14%	3.45%
2	75.00%	20.00%	5.00%

Believe assessment is critical to facilitating student success

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	75.86%	13.79%	10.34%
2	75.00%	15.00%	10.00%

*Note.* The alternate question in the Round 2 survey, “Believe assessment is helpful in facilitating student success” reached a statistical level of consensus of agreement among the panelists.

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding these qualities:

*I agree with these statements, but would echo the idea others expressed that there are student affairs professionals who are engaged in work that might not be seen as educational. These staff may also be committed to assessment, but wouldn't necessarily share these particular dispositions.*

*These two sentiments are so entwined... educators promote student success through facilitating/providing educational opportunities. Even those whose primary job function is to deliver services, they still play a role in helping shape the educational environment of the institution and/or creating student employment learning opportunities.*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*In my experience a very high proportion of student affairs professionals are reluctant to claim a status as educators. The divide between faculty & staff in status is often huge and intimidating.*

*Not all professionals are involved in student learning and development. Some are involved in facilities, budgets, human resources, etc. and design assessments around those areas.*

*Viewing themselves as educators seems critical to this cluster of items. I am uncertain whether staff who effectively integrate assessment into practice actually believe assessment to be critical in facilitating student success. Rather, I think these staff see*

*assessment as helpful in facilitating student success, but I'm not sure that they themselves would use the word "critical."*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
7a	Value their role as an educator	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
7b	Believe assessment is critical to facilitating student success	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

## **Question Block 8**

### Previous Results

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Are interested in learning about the student-affairs profession

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	48.27%	44.83%	6.90%
2	35.00%	50.00%	15.00%

Believe assessment is critical to the success of student affairs

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	68.96%	24.14%	6.90%
2	75.00%	15.00%	10.00%

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding these qualities:

*I assume that they already have some knowledge of the student affairs profession since they are student affairs professionals. Important? Yes. Critical? I don't know. Student Affairs assessment hasn't been around all that long and I'm not sure staff see how assessment fits in with budgeting, facilities, program and service planning, staffing, marketing, etc. I guess it depends on the experience level of the staff member and their exposure to the bigger picture.*

*While some who successfully integrate assessment may have these dispositions, others may focus primarily on program improvement and student success. This may correlate with time in the field and placement in the organization.*

*I think it's possible that these folks are interested in learning about the student affairs profession -- but I'm not sure it's essential to be effective.*

*I believe strongly in the second statement (assessment is critical to success of student affairs) because it should be a foundational competency for professionals. However, there may be some professionals who are strong at assessment who may not want to learn more about the profession. Assessment is sort of a niche industry, and I've talked to*

*enough people from outside of student affairs to know that they can be good at Student Affairs assessment without wanting to learn much about the profession, per se.*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*The fact that student affairs professionals believe assessment is critical to the success of the field, I believe, is tied largely to assessment results yielding more money/resource.*

*Our assessment efforts here have been very much tied to student learning and telling the student affairs story of contribution, so I think this would be a way to accurately describe student affairs professionals here who are good at integrating assessment. I think that many, even those who are good at it, would not directly correlate assessment and critical to success of student affairs.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below.

Student-affairs professionals who effectively integrate assessment into their practice...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
8a	Are interested in learning about the student-affairs profession	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
8b	Believe assessment is critical to the success of student affairs	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

## DISPOSITION DEVELOPMENT--SURVEY 3

The Delphi Survey 2 included 8 statements regarding ways student-affairs professionals can develop an assessment disposition. The 5 statements that did not reach consensus in Round 2 are summarized in the sections to follow. Each summary includes the percentages of agreement (strongly agree and agree), uncertainty, and disagreement (strongly disagree and disagree). Comments from participants that pertain to the remaining statements have also been included to represent various opinions and to allow you the opportunity to reflect on the opinions of other panel experts and determine your current level of agreement.

## **Question Block 9**

### Previous Results

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

They are expected to meet accreditation standards

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	41.38%	34.48%	24.14%
2	50.00%	20.00%	30.00%

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding this quality:

*I think SA staff in program-level accreditation environments (i.e., counseling) can/could develop healthy assessment dispositions because close accreditation often serves as both incentive and accountability (carrot and stick). Accreditation at the regional level I agree is too far removed from daily work to be anything but an external motivator to count and describe, rather than make meaning or use data to demonstrate value.*

*Having expectations to meet accreditation standards seems more punitive (as another respondent said) and more like it would inhibit good assessment.*

*I think these factors may contribute to the development of such a disposition - but perhaps aren't essential for it.*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding this quality:

*In my opinion "They are expected to meet accreditation standards" is more likely to induce resistance or resentment than to produce a disposition towards willingly and effectively engaging in assessment. Though these may be used to develop an assessment disposition, such a disposition is more valuable when it is not motivated by external demands. I think those items that can be perceived as "punitive" (or potentially so) (e.g., accreditation/performance reviews, etc.) are not necessarily going to contribute to the development of a student affairs assessment disposition.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the statement below.



Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
9b	They are expected to meet accreditation standards	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding this statement?

## Question Block 12

### Previous Results

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

They are placed in assessment work groups

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	65.52%	31.03%	3.45%
2	70.00%	25.00%	5.00%

They are involved in professional associations that foster a broader perspective about assessment

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	72.41%	24.14%	3.45%
2	75.00%	25.00%	0.00%

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding these qualities:

*Committees are a good way to get staff to think about other ways to assess programs, services, facilities, etc. Groups can also help alleviate concerns around assessment and help build an understanding of current assessments and ethical assessment practices.*

*I like the idea of assessment work groups, but "placed into" suggests an element of force that, again, is a sticks rather than a carrots approach.*

*Reinforcement. Reinforcement. Reinforcement.*

*Yes - I think these items will definitely help individuals develop assessment dispositions (more so than being connected to accreditation, etc.).*

*Active involvement in professional associations likely leads to a sense of wanting to "be better" as a professional. Those with an assessment orientation likely want to enhance their professional competence.*

*I am quite skeptical of attempting to cultivate an assessment disposition by placing a professional into an assessment work group when their interests are not there. That would probably work about as well as trying to cultivate in me an interest in university relations by placing me on a university relations work group {shudder}. I would serve to the best of my ability because of a sense of integrity, but as soon as I rotate off of that work group, I'm done. I might be more mindful of implications for university relations, but I am not going to feel greater disposition to do that work. For professional association involvement, even if one chooses a section or special-interest-group that is not explicitly assessment focused, if the association structures its professional development (PD) well, those PD opportunities will integrate assessment ideas into the discussion. The association will also incorporate assessment into the opportunity itself*

*will go beyond merely taking a satisfaction survey or indirect learning outcomes assessment at the end.*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding these qualities:

*Professional groups often have special-interest areas which some members buy into and others do not find valuable. The professional assoc. is thus a good place to highlight good work with may grab their attention or not. It's a little hit or miss as to whether it would foster a disposition to do assessment. And even more hit or miss as to whether than assessment would be "effective."*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding each statement below.

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
12d	They are placed in assessment work groups	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
12f	They are involved in professional associations that foster a broader perspective about assessment	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding these statements?

**Question Block 14**

Previous Results

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

They associate assessment as an integral part of the institution

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	72.42%	20.69%	6.90%
2	75.00%	20.00%	5.00%

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding this quality:

*They are more likely to develop an assessment disposition if they associate assessment as an integral part of their work.*

*I agree with the participant comment from last Round. Anything integral to the institution might not earn a favorable sentiment. Rather than associating assessment as integral to the institution, professionals who effectively develop an assessment disposition associate assessment as integral to the program or service that they themselves provide to students.*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding this quality:

*It's very easy, at least at a large institution, to be in philosophical opposition to something that upper administration thinks is "integral" to the institution.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the statement below.

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
14f	They associate assessment as an integral part of the institution	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding this statement?

## **Question Block 15**

### Previous Results

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

They have training on how students learn

Survey	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree
1	58.62%	31.03%	10.34%
2	45.00%	40.00%	15.00%

Summary of participant comments from Round 2 survey regarding this quality:

*We are educators. Educators assess. We should always be seeking more knowledge about the thing we're assessing. And once again, even if we only deliver services/manage facilities, we're all educators and part of creating the educational environment of the institution. This shared ownership over the educational experience of students and \*empowerment\* to participate in the conversation is critical to student affairs assessment since the student affairs voice can be so easily sidelined depending on the culture of the institution.*

*As most student affairs professionals might not have this training, I would believe that not all assessment professionals would either. Could be.*

*Some departments aren't about 'student learning' but they are critical to student affairs. Not at all assessment is about student learning.*

For your reference, below is a summary of participant comments from the Round 1 survey regarding this quality:

*Not all student affairs professionals are involved in student programs. I'm not sure if training on how students learn leads to a stronger assessment disposition. It may lead to changes in programs and services but might not lead to an assessment.*

Please indicate your level of agreement regarding the statement below.

Student-affairs professionals are likely to develop an assessment disposition when...

Q	Statement	Strongly Agree	Agree	Uncertain	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
15d	They have training on how students learn	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

What comments, if any, do you have regarding this statement?

## OTHER COMMENTS

Please provide any additional comments regarding the qualities of a student-affairs assessment disposition and ways to develop this disposition.

Finally, please provide identifying information below, so you can be listed accurately as one of the expert panelists for this Delphi Study. If you have recently changed positions, please provide information about the position you held when the study first began. Thank you!

Name:

Title:

Name of Institution:

Location of Institution (city and state):

## **APPENDIX M. DELPHI SURVEY FINAL PANELISTS**

- Dan Bureau, Director, Student Affairs Learning and Assessment and Special Assistant to the Vice President for Student Affairs, University of Memphis, Memphis, Tennessee;
- Jeff Dupont, Senior Student Affairs Director, Fort Lewis College, Durango, Colorado
- Becki Elkins, Registrar and Director of Institutional Research and Assessment, Cornell College, Mount Vernon, Iowa;
- Theodore Elling, Associate Vice Chancellor for Student Affairs - Research and Systems Development, University of North Carolina at Charlotte, Charlotte, North Carolina
- Marla A. Franco, Director, Student Affairs Assessment & Research, University of Arizona, Tucson, Arizona;
- Judd Harbin, Director of Campus Life Assessment, University of Nevada, Las Vegas, Las Vegas, Nevada;
- Bill Heinrich, Director of Assessment, Hub for Innovation in Learning and Technology, Michigan State University, East Lansing, Michigan;
- Caleb J. Keith, Senior Coordinator for Assessment & Research, University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia;
- Andy Mauk, Director, Student Affairs Assessment, Research & Planning, University of North Carolina Wilmington, Wilmington, North Carolina;
- Kristen McKinney, Director, Student Affairs Information and Research Office, UCLA, Los Angeles, California;
- Victoria Livingston, Coordinator, Co-Curricular Assessment and Program Review, University of Wisconsin-Platteville, Platteville, Wisconsin;



- Leslie Meyerhoff, Director Student and Campus Life Assessment and Planning, Cornell University, Ithaca, New York;
- Daniel Newhart, Director, Student Affairs Research Evaluation and Planning, Oregon State University, Corvallis, Oregon;
- Matthew D. Pistilli, Director of Assessment and Planning for Student Affairs, IUPUI, Indianapolis, Indiana;
- Darby M. Roberts, Director, Student Life Studies, Texas A&M University, College Station, Texas;
- Pamelyn Klepal Shefman, Director of Assessment and Planning, University of Houston, Houston, Texas;
- Amanda Thomas, Director of Student Affairs Assessment, Case Western Reserve University, Cleveland, Ohio; and
- Katherine N. Yngve, Intercultural Learning & Assessment Specialist, Purdue University, West Lafayette, Indiana.