

**CONTRIBUTIONS TO STUDENT LEARNING:
ALIGNING STUDENT AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT WITH INSTITUTIONAL
ACCREDITATION IMPROVEMENT GOALS**

by

Iveta Ziegelbauer Tweedy

An executive position paper submitted to the Faculty of the University of Delaware in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES	ix
ABSTRACT	x
Chapter	
1. INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY	1
Statement of Problem.....	3
Improvement Goals.....	4
Guiding Questions	6
2. LITERATURE REVIEW/CONTEXT FOR THE PROBLEM	7
Student Affairs' Roles in Student Learning and Assessment	7
Research on Out-of-Class Student Learning.....	13
Sustainable Assessment Practices	18
University of Delaware	22
University of Delaware Priorities/Aspirations.....	22
Student Life Connection to General Education	27
Accreditation Process at the University of Delaware	31
Accreditation and Evolving Priorities.....	34
3. METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS	43
Design of the Study.....	47
Sample Selection.....	51
Data Collection and Analysis.....	54
Document Review.....	54
Interviews.....	59

Supporting Literature	64
University of Delaware Applicability	65
Validity	67
4. FINDINGS	68
Finding 1: Aligning Common Aims and Identifying Distinctiveness	69
Finding 2: Determining Educational Capacity	82
Finding 3: Establishing a Culture of Assessment	106
Finding 4: Achieving a Role in the Accreditation Cycle	123
Finding 5: Developing Effective Use of Technology	133
Finding 6: Establishing Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts	143
5. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALIGNING STUDENT AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT WITH INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION IMPROVEMENT GOALS	159
Recommendation 1: Establish Common Aims through General Education Objectives and Identify Areas of Division of Student Life Distinctiveness in Student Learning	160
Recommendation 2: Invest in Personnel and Develop a Culture of Assessment	167
Recommendation 3: Foster Collaborative Efforts and Interdependency	172
Recommendation 4: Establish Practices that Demonstrate Transparency	176
Recommendation 5: Infuse Technology to Maximize Assessment Efforts	179
Recommendation 6: Build Capacity for Division of Student Life to Make Direct Contributions in Periodic Review Cycles	181
Conclusion	185
REFERENCES	186
Appendix	
A. INTERVIEW PARTICIPANT LETTER	206
B. INFORMED CONSENT FORM	208
C. DOCUMENT REVIEW RUBRIC	210
D. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS	212

E. MSCHE STANDARDS FOR ACCREDITATION.....	213
F. PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR STUDENT AFFAIRS (NASPA).....	215
G. 9 PRINCIPLES OF GOOD PRACTICE FOR ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING (AAHE)	217
H. GENERAL EDUCATION AT THE UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE.....	220
I. UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE CENTER FOR TEACHING AND ASSESSMENT OF LEARNING	221
J. UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE MISSION STATEMENT AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES	222
K. UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE DIVISION OF STUDENT LIFE	226
L. UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE DIVISION OF STUDENT LIFE ORGANIZATIONAL CHART	227
M. UNIVERSITY OF DELAWARE RESIDENCE LIFE & HOUSING CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT SUCCESS INDICATORS	228
N. INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL	230

LIST OF TABLES

Table 3.1	Data Collection Matrix	46
Table 4.2	General Education Domains Considered for Student Affairs Contributions	83
Table 4.3	Indicators of Assessment Culture	108
Table 4.4	Summary of Study Institutions' Technology Use	141

ABSTRACT

This Executive Position Paper (EPP) presents an examination of the role of student affairs in broad based student learning and explores potential connections of student affairs units to general education goals. Furthermore, it presents an examination of potential roles student affairs can play in contributing to educational effectiveness and participating in an institutional periodic accreditation process. There is mounting pressure for higher education to measure and demonstrate student learning. This includes student affairs.

This study is a qualitative examination of three institutions that were deemed to model practices in assessing student learning and making tangible contributions to general education through the efforts of student affairs. Literature on outside of classroom education domains and capacity is offered. The intended aim was capturing national best practices, sequential steps, evolution, and key influential factors toward connecting curricular and co-curricular student learning efforts in a manner that could provide a road map for the Division of Student Life at the University of Delaware. This study utilized an expansive document review analysis of the identified model institutions, interviews with key institutional leaders in student affairs and educational effectiveness assessment. Model institution practices were cross-referenced with leading scholarship in

student affairs. Findings were further cross-referenced with institutional leaders at the University of Delaware for potential applicability.

A qualitative approach allowed for rich story-telling of the deeper context and of the development process, including valuable lessons learned, of student affairs' path toward a measurable role in contributing to broad-based institutional student learning aspirations. Six themes emerged that represent key factors and approaches that led to organizational growth and improvement by the three institutions in this study. These include alignment with institutional general education goals, determining educational capacity, establishing a culture of assessment, achieving a role in the accreditation cycle, effective use of technology, and the importance of partnerships. An expansive review of scholarly literature provided ample support of the identified themes and presented philosophies on the important role of student affairs in student learning. Recommendations are offered in a manner that furthers and expands upon the six themes with deep consideration for the institutional specific context.

Chapter 1

INTRODUCTION TO THE STUDY

“Because student learning is at the heart of the mission of most institutions of higher education, the assessment of student learning is an essential component of the assessment of institutional effectiveness.” (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006, p. 63)

“The effectiveness of an institution rests upon the contribution that each of the institution’s programs and services makes toward achieving the goals of the institution as a whole.” (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006, p. 25)

Colleges and universities across the United States have been facing increasing pressure to demonstrate student learning gains stemming from the undergraduate experience. Traditional measures of overall educational quality, and return on investment, are being called to question and stakeholders are seeking transparency and accountability. It is becoming increasingly clear that measuring the impact of an academic major or discipline will not suffice in isolation of examining the broader campus learning experience. On residential campuses, the expense of the college learning experience goes well above and beyond tuition costs and the calls for displaying impact on learning also go beyond the classroom and enter the student affairs, outside the classroom, domain. According to CNBC Economics reporter John Schoen (2015), college housing costs alone have risen 49.3% from 1994 to 2010. Cost-benefit conversations include questions of the value of the residential experience. Historically,

educational quality was only considered and measured within a classroom context. Outside the classroom learning goals, and assessment of learning goals, have not consistently been a priority for student affairs or utilized as part of the university measures of educational quality utilized in institutional accreditation.

Assessing student learning is complicated yet crucial work in higher education. As student affairs units are called upon to display measures of student learning in the language of accreditation, the response to these challenges will drive alternative futures. One future could be to simply meet minimum reporting expectations. Accreditation can be viewed as a set of external conditions and pressures to be met. That approach may lead to new systems of reporting but may not lead to enhanced student learning. A different future could be achieved by capitalizing on the real power and benefit of accreditation, which provides an avenue to focus on all learning opportunities (existing and new) to support students in their process of learning and acquiring the full breadth of the undergraduate educational goals. Undergoing a periodic self-study and fully engaging with the campus-wide community in the assessment of student learning can provide the student affairs units with an opportunity to display tangible contributions to the university priorities as well as key information to utilize in their ongoing cycle of improvement.

Similar to many campuses across the nation, the Division of Student Life at the University of Delaware is faced with increasing scrutiny and a need to demonstrate measurable contributions to student learning as defined by the university mission, strategic plan, and General Education requirements. This Executive Position Paper will examine opportunities to better align the Division of Student Life's assessment of

learning with institutional accreditation improvement goals at the University of Delaware campus. Specifically, focus will be given to connecting the Division of Student Life's assessment initiatives to University General Education Goals. This chapter discusses the problem, provides a context for the problem, proposes improvement goals and guiding questions for the study, and describes the project.

Statement of Problem

In 2010, the University of Delaware completed the self-study process as part of the requirements for Middle States accreditation. The three self-study teams focused on key University priorities, one of which is titled "A Diverse and Stimulating Undergraduate Academic Environment." The Division of Student Life's contributions to the University educational priorities were considered under this domain. As part of the self-study process, a report was generated outlining both successes and recommendations toward improving the overall learning climate for University of Delaware students. Under the heading "Effective Integration of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs" (unpublished report), it is noted that "Student engagement and student learning are not the exclusive purview of the academic classroom. A carefully conceived and robust program of Student Life is an essential complement to classroom instruction, particularly in the area of mastery of general education competencies." Two recommendations specific to Student Life were articulated and the challenges to meet these recommendations are the focus of this project:

1. While the Division of Student Life is to be commended for the serious approach that it is taking in creating opportunities for student engagement and assessing the effectiveness of those activities, it is important to also engage in assessments that tie those initiatives to specific University General Education Goals.
2. To the greatest extent possible, assessment efforts should be coordinated with those of the Office of Educational Assessment to avoid unnecessary duplication and to ensure appropriate triangulation of information related to mastery of general education competencies.

Two areas of need for improvement can be derived from these statements. The first is that these recommendations imply that the Division of Student Life contributions to General Education goals are not clearly articulated in an assessable or accessible manner. The second implication is that Student Life assessment efforts are not viewed as being connected to the overall efforts by the University of Delaware that measure student learning toward “mastery of general education competencies” as requested by Middle States accreditation.

Improvement Goals

The Division of Student Life expends a great deal of time, energy, and other resources toward meeting student needs. By establishing a means to measure

contributions to student learning, which is arguably the core purpose of the entire undergraduate experience, the often invisible contributions by Student Life to General Education can become apparent and effectively explored by institutional leadership.

The goals of this project are to (A) identify existing and potential measurable contributions of the University of Delaware Division of Student Life to the institutional general education goals, (B) provide the Division of Student Life leadership with recommended strategies to more closely align assessment efforts with the accreditation continuous improvement cycle of goal setting, assessment of student learning, and utilization of findings to make decisions about programmatic initiative improvements, and (C) help the Division of Student Life become a model within Middle States for demonstrating measurable contributions to out-of-class learning that are directly connected to institutional priorities for undergraduate education.

Should these goals be accomplished, it is envisioned that the Division of Student Life may be able to more directly and effectively contribute to student attainment of General Education goals and better capitalize on the potential for increased collaborative opportunities between the Division of Student Life and academic affairs. Furthermore, by taking part in institution-wide assessment of student learning, the Division of Student Life can both provide valuable information to the Office of Educational Assessment and in turn gain rich information about intersections of student learning gains inside and outside the classroom.

Guiding Questions

The following questions will guide the direction and boundaries of this study.

- How are model institutions approaching the process of assessing student learning in the out-of-class domain toward meeting their general education goals?
- Are the selected model institutional processes of assessing student learning in the out-of-class domain for meeting their general education goals supported by best practices recommended in literature?
- What opportunities exist for the University of Delaware Division of Student Life to make assessable contributions to general education?

Chapter 2

LITERATURE REVIEW/CONTEXT FOR THE PROBLEM

Student Affairs' Roles in Student Learning and Assessment

According to Evans and Reason (2001) and Blimling (2013), student affairs efforts to articulate a role in student learning within higher education can be traced back to 1937 with the publication of *The Student Personnel Point of View* (American Council on Education, 1937). Evans and Reason note that a number of publications within the profession continue to assert the role of student affairs in student learning. Specific reports discussed include *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* (ACPA, 1996), *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* (ACPA & NASPA, 1997), and *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998), which “have been hailed for introducing a new student affairs philosophy focused on student learning and encouraging collaboration between student and academic affairs professionals” (p. 359).

Making an assertion about a role in student learning has proven to be much easier for the profession than demonstrating tangible contributions to student learning in measurable ways. Garland and Grace (1993) discussed that the “role of student affairs professional has continued to grow in support of institutional goals and needs, but in the

role of supporting academic and institutional functions, student affairs has often been regarded as peripheral” (p. 6). Prominent student affairs scholars, Gregory Blimling and Elizabeth Whitt (1999), critique the educational worth of student affairs facilitated activities by noting that “Many student activities are offered with a minimum of intellectual content” (p. 189). They specifically mention programs and events that are social and recreational in nature. They add that even though “student affairs organizations offer more intellectual experiences, such as workshops on leadership, few in the academic community see the latter as representing the major effort of student affairs” (p. 189). Investment in student entertainment is quite visible while the many other contributions to students are often invisible and undocumented. It should be no surprise that another view common to the profession since 1937 is that of concern for not being recognized for contributions to higher education.

Presentations common at national conferences for student affairs professionals (American College Personnel Association, ACPA; National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, NASPA) focus on student behavior response, such as substance abuse, psychological concerns, navigating the parents of students, student violence, and social justice issues on the college campus. Although student learning is emerging as a topic at these conferences, the type of learning focused on by student affairs professionals rarely would be considered assessable or as contributing to the institutional accreditation aims. Some authors have even expressed concern about the ability to measure impact on the behavioral issues that consume so much time and focus of the profession. According to Baxter Magolda (1999) in her chapter *Engaging Students*

in Active Learning within the publication *Good Practice in Student Affairs: Principles to Foster Student Learning*:

As far as the most serious campus issues are concerned – violence in relationships, eating disorders, substance abuse, appreciation of diversity – we have little evidence that our concerted efforts are making a major difference. We have substantial evidence, primarily from behavior data and understanding student development, that many students are not developmentally “capable” of appreciating diversity, making healthy decisions about themselves, and managing their conflict with others (p. 42).

The absence of tangible outcomes within the profession has also been commented on by those specializing in student learning assessment. Bresciani, Gardner, and Hickmott (2009) share their views about some of the challenges in identifying tangible learning outcomes stemming from energies expended by student affairs professionals. They note that “frustration often arises for student affairs professionals when they cannot distinguish between the passion that drives the reason they do what they do from what they can reasonably accomplish given their resources and means of delivery” (p. 143). The authors use an example of a participant in their study, a residence hall director, whose goal is for “all the residents to take responsibility for their wellness. The director’s desire for the residents to take responsibility for their own behavior, especially when making choices for their well-being, is exactly why the director loves the job” (p. 143). The authors stress the importance of differentiating between one’s values or passions and reality, and focusing educational strategies in areas where “there are systematic means designed to do so” (p. 143). It is not uncommon for student affairs practitioners to be driven by personal passions and interests, but it is essential to support institutional educational aims first.

The authors go on to note “A further example of this is that while student affairs professionals value changing students’ behavior to make healthier choices, the intended outcome is not changed behavior” (p. 144). Authors point out that measures of programmatic success, such as changes of behavior, may not be productive and are attempting to “influence variables that are outside your locus of control. Rather, consider evaluating how well your program contributes the (a) knowledge, (b) skills, and (c) attitudes that precede behavior change” (p. 144). In their discussion of reasons that student affairs educational efforts are left unconsidered by the institution, the authors express that in recent years, members of the student affairs profession “have begun to evaluate their contributions to student learning and development in a more systematic manner. However, even with the increased emphasis on evaluating student learning and development, many student affairs professionals are still without evidence of their contributions” (p. 135). Argyris (1991) comments in the *Harvard Business Review on Knowledge Management* that “Professionals embody the learning dilemma: they are enthusiastic about continuous improvement – and often the biggest obstacle to its success” (p. 85). In order to begin to put forward evidence of student learning contributions, many in the student affairs profession may need to set aside personal outcomes and replace them with institutional student learning goals.

Student development perspectives (including behavior change domains) are considered foundational to many in student affairs. Rethinking practices and measures of success toward assessable student learning can be rather complex. Often times, the measures that student affairs professionals utilize in assessment focus primarily on

counting what is most readily available, such as the number of students utilizing services and/or attending activities. In addition, as Blimling (1999) notes, “Those measures of student affairs that do exist focus primarily on measuring student satisfaction” (p. 54). Banta, Jones, and Black (2009) note that satisfaction measures are often an intermediary step taken between counting heads and assessment of student learning. Satisfaction and head counts are important considerations for the profession, but they do not indicate student learning gains, especially those learning gains that are valued and measured at the institutional level for the purposes of accreditation. Having goals and measures related to student participation may be useful managerial strategies, but should not be confused with learning outcome measures.

Sandeen and Barr (2006) offer another perspective about the lack of tangible assessment of student learning within the student affairs practices:

There are obvious risks for student affairs leaders in assessment, as results from various studies may reveal some embarrassing weaknesses and shortcomings in various programs. The temptation for student affairs staff may be to avoid certain issues or only to conduct safe studies that will not reflect poorly on their programs or impinge on areas outside student affairs. Integrity in assessment is absolutely necessary to achieve results that can improve the quality of education; student affairs staff deal with critical issues that affect the lives and the educational success of students, so any assessment plan that shies away from conducting and publishing studies that address the most important issues is indefensible. Assessment may be the best way to ensure a strong educational and ethical commitment to quality services and programs in student affairs (p. 144).

In the words of Terenzini and Pascarella (1994), "Organizationally and operationally, we have lost sight of the forest” (p. 33). They discuss that in order for undergraduate education to be improved, “faculty members, joined by academic and student affairs administrators, must devise ways to deliver undergraduate education that

are as comprehensive and integrated as the ways that students actually learn” (p. 33). The authors recognize the potential of deepening connections between the academic affairs and student affairs areas of a college campus. However, they suggest that a “whole new mindset is needed to capitalize on the interrelatedness of the in- and out-of-class influences on student learning and the functional interconnectedness of academic and student affairs divisions” (p. 33). They go on to state that “...evidence suggests that a majority of the important changes that occur during college are probably the cumulative result of a set of interrelated and mutually supporting experiences, in class and out, sustained over an extended period of time” (p. 32). Operationalizing the integrative variables in a manner that they can be measured will be key.

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2006) recognizes that student affairs has the capacity to play a measurable role in achieving institutional education goals. The authors state that:

Those who administer services such as residential life, advising, career development, learning support, service learning, and financial aid are partners with faculty members and students in developing outcomes and assessing student learning. For example, student development personnel help students to develop their own ethical values and to achieve the institution’s goal of graduating students who are responsible citizens in a multicultural society (p. 7).

While there are many legitimate critiques of student affairs practices, especially those related to articulating aspirations in the language of student learning, there are several authors who perceive the emphasis on examining the broad learning experience on college campuses as an exceptional opportunity for the profession. Suskie (2009) discusses that “An important difference between contemporary and traditional thinking about assessment is that under contemporary approaches, assessment is viewed as part of

an integrated, collaborative learning experience” (p. 4). She adds that students tend to “learn better when their college experiences are not collections of isolated courses and activities but are purposefully designed as coherent, integrated learning experiences in which courses and out-of-class experiences build on and reinforce one another” (p. 4). Sandeen (2004) adds that the examination of the “total student experience” in defining educational quality is leading to efforts to improve student learning inside and outside the classroom and “provides student affairs the best opportunity in its history to become a vital contributor to the education of students throughout their academic careers” (p. 33). According to Blimling and Whitt (1999), student affairs leaders and educators “can seize opportunities to generalize learning from a variety of out-of-class activities by thinking through what they want students to learn from the experiences they are structuring, stating these clearly, and by linking with academic programs to form partnerships” (p. 189). The timing may be ideal for the student affairs profession to shift toward assessable student learning as its primary aim. Leading authors in the profession seem to express many of the same sentiments as the accrediting agencies about the need for alignment of student affairs work with institutional accreditation improvement goals.

Research on Out-of-Class Student Learning

It has been documented through numerous studies and publications that engagement outside the classroom has a significant impact on the overall undergraduate educational experience (e.g. Blimling, 2015; Fried, 2012; Kuh, 1995; Kuh, Douglas, Lund, & Ramin-Gyurnek, 1994; Kuh, Pace, & Vesper, 1997; Kuh, Schuh, Whitt, &

Associates, 1991; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005; Terenzini, Pascarella, & Blimling, 1996). Terenzini et al. (1996) found that "students' out-of-class experiences appear to be far more influential in students' academic and intellectual development than many faculty members and academic and student affairs administrators think" (p. 157). Some of the more recent research in this area relates to the overall impact of experiences outside the classroom in terms of competency and skill development and cognitive gains that seem to more readily bridge goals between the academic and non-academic sectors.

Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) note that involving students in the learning process beyond the traditional classroom and providing opportunities for them to learn from their peers has a high potential for positive impact on students' career development, cognitive skills and intellectual growth, educational attainment and persistence, leadership skill development, moral development, and overall academic learning. Other scholars have found that "Students learn more when they are intensely involved in their education and have opportunities to think about and apply what they are learning in different settings" (Kuh, Kinzie, Schuh, Whitt, & Associates, 2005, p. 11). Pascarella and Terenzini (2005) also noted that "Peer interactions, particularly those that extend and reinforce what happens in the academic program, appear to influence positively knowledge acquisition and academic skills development during college" (p. 121). Each week in the life of a student contains 168 hours. Approximately 16 hours are allocated to class attendance, and a generous estimate of 35 hours are allocated to sleep, leaving 117 hours for out of class academic and non-academic opportunities. It is likely becoming quite rare to encounter a student who follows the old rule of thumb that for every hour in

class, one should invest 3 hours in studying. How students elect to spend their time and the impact of these decisions is not only a major question in student affairs, but throughout the academy.

Student engagement has been identified as a key contributing factor to student success in college and successful programs intentionally structure efforts that actively encourage students to participate in “educationally purposeful activities” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 8) rather than simply relying on “products of serendipity” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 9). How students invest their time and what they do in terms of engagement are considered key indicators toward success (Kuh et al., 2005). The leaders in charge of administering the National Survey of Student Engagement (<http://nsse.iub.edu/html/about.cfm>) as well as Kuh et al. (2005) discuss student engagement as representing two critical features of collegiate quality. The first area discussed is “the amount of time and effort students put into their studies” (p. 9) and other educational opportunities and offerings designed with overall student success in mind. The second area addresses how the institution expends its energies and how it “deploys its resources and organizes the curriculum and other learning opportunities to get students to participate in activities that decades of research studies show are linked to student learning” (NSSE, para. 1). There is a wide range of educational opportunities in the out of class arena of the university. Purposeful assessment of learning outcomes in this area will allow student affairs professionals to effectively target and leverage opportunities within their scope of control.

Several authors have asserted that the continuous effort of drawing distinction between student development and student learning is unhelpful, and often counter-productive, to the broad educational exercise and advocate for an integrated and interrelated approach (Baxter Magolda, 1996; Baxter Magolda, 1999; Fried & Associates, 1995; Fried & Associates, 2012; King & Baxter Magolda, 1996; Keeling, 2004; Keeling, Wall, Underhile, & Dungy, 2008; Whitt & Miller, 1999). Baxter Magolda (1999) describes such efforts as “meaningless, if not destructive” (p. 39). Fried (2012) asks “Why do we continue to use the words *learning* and *development* as if they were two separate processes when we know that development supports learning cognitively and emotionally?” (p. 18). From this mindset, several integrated approaches and definitions of learning are presented. In the publication *Student Learning as Student Affairs Work: Responding to Our Imperative*, authors discuss four broad domains of learning: *cognitive competence*, *intrapersonal competence*, *interpersonal competence*, and *practical competence* (Baxter Magolda, 1999; Whitt & Miller, 1999). Definitions for this type of learning, as well as a body of research on the types of activities and experiences outside the classroom that are associated with gains in this learning, are presented.

Keeling (2004), in *Learning Reconsidered*, furthered the dialogue by providing a definition of learning as a “comprehensive, holistic, transformative activity” (p. 18) and by focusing on integrating learning and development concepts. He proposes seven broad learning outcomes for the overall student experience on a college campus: *cognitive complexity; knowledge acquisition, integration, and application; humanitarianism; civic engagement; interpersonal and intrapersonal competence; practical competence;*

persistence and academic achievement (pp. 18-19). These outcomes are further expanded by providing descriptions of the types of learning to be expected under each outcome, listing a sample of activities and experiences that support such learning, and identifying pertinent theories and research approaches to guide educators. A subsequent publication *Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience* (Keeling, 2006) serves as a roadmap for educators to implement the types of structures and initiatives that support the desired learning.

Fried and Associates (2012) compliment *Learning Reconsidered* but expand the conversation by adding a pedagogical lens to the integrated learning exercise and by asserting a need to prepare students for active roles in the society and toward having the capacity to solve new and ever-changing world problems. The authors assert that the “core work of the student affairs profession is to help students learn to live in a world with a sense of vocation, commitment to skillful participation in a democratic society, and the ability to live productively in family and community” (p. 18). Fried and Associates (2012) in many ways offer an alignment with the academic affairs assertions, as represented by Bok (2006) in *Our Underachieving Colleges: A Candid Look at How Much Students Learn and Why They Should Be Learning More*, that higher education institutions have a responsibility to prepare students to be informed and active citizens. Fried and Associates (2012) not only advocate for connected and integrated approaches to teaching and learning among academic and student affairs, but also assert a need for experiential learning and application of learning into practice, broadening focus beyond isolated college campus opportunities and toward engagement in a larger community.

Finally, Collins (2012) in *The Future of Student Learning in Student Affairs* addresses the changing structures of the learning process in student affairs, such as a need to capitalize on technology versus relying purely on traditional face-to-face interactions, and outlines processes by which student affairs professionals can best support student learning outside the classroom with a changing landscape mindset. The value and potential of learning gains that can be achieved through meaningful and structured experiences outside the classroom have been well documented and this brief review provides simply a snapshot of existing literature and research that yields basic foundation and background for this project.

Sustainable Assessment Practices

The purpose of this project is not to determine whether or not the Division of Student Life contributes to learning in some way. Any student affairs professional could likely come up with dozens of anecdotal indicators where it is perceived that students learned as a result of student affairs work. Rather, the improvement goals of this project are focused on framing the Division of Student Life work in the language and practices that are directly connected to the University educational objectives and expressed in an assessable manner so that they have the capacity to play a role in the accreditation process. By doing so, the Division of Student Life units (Appendix L) will be able to join the institution-wide cycle of continuous self-improvement. Ideally, all the units will recognize the potential and opportunities that lie within this connection, and will not view student learning assessment as a trend to simply ride out.

For those who believe that current assessment emphasis will eventually be replaced by some other set of priorities that emerge later, Hernon and Dugan (2004) note in their book *Outcomes Assessment in Higher Education* that “Regardless of their position or source of employment, the message of the various authors is the same: outcomes assessment is here to stay (it is not a fad for institutions to either ignore or discard)” (p. xvii). The foundational purpose of higher education is student learning. Student affairs professionals, as members of the higher education system, can be seen as having an obligation to make tangible contributions to the overall examination of student learning gains at the institutional level. As more members of the institution embrace the value of assessing student learning, the result may also be a diminishing number of silos. Hernon and Dugan (2004) also note that “Outcomes assessment links institutions to their stakeholders by providing evidence of accountability, and it enables courses and programs to link to the institutional mission and to demonstrate that learning actually occurred” (p. xvii). These types of links may also play an important role in reinforcing a continuous cycle of improvement.

In his publication *Planning and Assessment in Higher Education: Demonstrating Institutional Effectiveness*, Michael Middaugh (2010) addresses this:

It should also be noted that the standard for assessing student learning requires clearly articulated statements of expected outcomes from *all* programs that aim to foster student learning and development. To the extent that units such as the Division of Student Life or the Division of Residence Life are engaged in student development activity on a campus, they must create, implement, and measure specific expected outcomes from their activity. Counseling services, career planning services, student activities centers, and the like clearly fall into this category. Many institutions have living/learning programs in residence halls, organized around specific general education skills developed by the institution. Accreditors would expect to see formal statements of expected outcomes from

these programs, as well as appropriate metrics that measure the extent to which those outcomes are being achieved among students involved in those programs. Note that throughout this discussion, the emphasis is on *students*-plural, not singular. Assessment of student learning is about aggregate student performance, not the performance of an individual student (p. 92).

Any professional in student affairs can likely identify a success story of an individual student. A career counselor may reflect upon the growth observed in a student over a period of time. A counseling professional may identify an individual who succeeded against all odds. A student activities professional would be expected to have stories about an organizational president who went from poor to excellent leadership. None of these tell the story of student learning relative to the 7,200 undergraduate students living in the University of Delaware residence halls, or the other approximately 10,000 students who may engage with the Division of Student Life professionals, programs and services. As Middaugh (2010) asserts, assessment expectations go well beyond the individual single-student example and will require focus on gains among the overall student body.

It is clear that assessment of learning will become a greater part of the professional life of many practitioners who currently are not focusing on this area.

Bresciani et al. (2009) point out that:

...it is important to differentiate between accountability and outcomes-based assessment. Accountability is a call by external, and sometimes internal, stakeholders for higher education institutions to demonstrate that they are not just graduating students, but that they are actually producing and encouraging the learning they claim. Additionally, accountability demands that institutions demonstrate they are effectively using resources and contributing to the overall growth and development of their students. Outcome-based assessment provides a means for assessing the levels and types of learning that occur. It is a tool or process that is intentional in nature and helps guide the development of programs and services, and thus it serves the purpose of accountability (p. 25).

Student affairs professionals can take this considerable and potentially new component of their work reality in a manner that can enhance their educational impact. Embracing assessment of student learning will not only meet accountability needs, but it has the capacity to play a vital role in all aspects of strategic planning and generating higher yields from investment of time and resources. Beyond the logical arguments for student affairs professionals to dedicate a higher emphasis on assessing learning, establishing sustainable assessment practices may require steps to build a culture of assessment into departments and the overall division. A positive approach and view of learning assessment as the right thing to do and incorporating assessment practices into overall work cycle has the potential to lead to higher returns on investment.

As the Division of Student Life units articulate a clear connection to the University priorities via learning outcomes, the language used in the articulation will be of critical importance. Hollowell, Middaugh, and Sibolski (2006), in a section titled *A set of platitudes*, note that:

It is fine for an institution to aspire to provide the finest undergraduate education in the nation or to promise that no academically qualified student will be denied admission because of inability to pay for a college education. It is encouraging when an institution promises competitive compensation for all employees or state-of-the-art research facilities for its faculty. However, these are not plans; they are aspirations that require careful charting of measurable action steps that lead to implementation. It is the identification of a course of action that transforms aspirations into reality through planning (p. 7).

In a similar manner, the Division of Student Life units will have to differentiate between broad, general aspirations, and at times platitudes, and the specific, measurable expressions of distinctive contributions to student learning as described by the University general education goals. Language used to describe and measure impact on student

learning should be crafted in a manner that directs the course of action. In order to develop sustainable assessment practices, the Division of Student Life units will need to attend to culture and language simultaneously.

University of Delaware

University of Delaware Priorities/Aspirations

What does the University of Delaware value? “Promotion of Learning” were among the key words expressed about the University of Delaware in 1743 when it was founded as one of “the oldest institutions of higher education in the United States”, with a class of students who would “go on to become statesmen, doctors, merchants, and scholars. Of special note, Thomas McKean, George Read, and James Smith would sign the Declaration of Independence; Read also would sign the U.S. Constitution” (University of Delaware; History). The University has prided itself on its strong tradition of educational excellence ever since. The University Motto has been *Scientia sol mentis est*. Knowledge is the light of the mind. The University of Delaware, a state supported but privately governed institution, is a Land Grant, Sea Grant, Space Grant, Carnegie Research University (very high research activity), and offers 4 associate's programs, 127 bachelor's programs, 84 master's programs, 42 doctoral programs, and 12 dual graduate programs. The University mission states that the University “exists to cultivate learning, develop knowledge, and foster the free exchange of ideas...has a strong tradition of distinguished scholarship, research, teaching, and service that is grounded in a commitment to increasing and disseminating scientific, humanistic, and social knowledge

for the benefit of the larger society...promotes an environment in which all people are inspired to learn, and encourages intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, free inquiry, and respect for the views and values of an increasingly diverse population”, and is “engaged in addressing the critical needs of the state, nation, and global community” (www.udel.edu). The University has become highly competitive and popular, with more than 25,000 freshman applicants for the Class of 2015. The incoming freshman class totals 4,492, with the average SAT score at 1216 (University of Delaware: Office of Institutional Research Facts and Figures).

In addition to its foundation described in the mission statement, the University of Delaware is driven by its strategic plan. The University has ambitious aspirations for the future. Dr. Patrick Harker joined the campus community in July 2007 and immediately began the process of establishing a new vision and strategic plan, which was announced in May 2008 as the Path to Prominence™. The strategic plan described five guiding principles for the University: Delaware first, diversity, partnership, engagement and impact. The strategic plan also highlighted six milestones: a diverse and stimulating undergraduate academic environment, a premier research and graduate University, excellence in professional education, the initiative for the planet, the global initiative and the engaged University (see Appendix F for full detail). During presentations and interviews, Dr. Harker stressed to all faculty and professional staff that the University of Delaware priorities and aspirations should be visibly apparent and felt throughout all areas of campus life and that the success of the University priorities is everyone’s business and responsibility.

The Path to Prominence™ was followed and furthered by the most recent strategic plan titled Delaware Will Shine, published in the spring of 2015, utilizing the same guiding principles, but specifying focus on five strategic initiatives: 1) A Welcoming and Collaborative Campus Community, 2) Innovative Education Design, 3) Multidisciplinary Research and Scholarship, 4) Campus Safety and Wellness, and 5) Community Engagement.

Similar to other campuses, the undergraduate student learning experience is also shaped by the institutional goals for general education. The General Education Initiative at the University of Delaware:

...was conceptualized as spanning the undergraduate experience and thereby enriching the education and enhancing the success of students at every stage. Moreover, the General Education Initiative would be implemented across all academic programs, and the entire academic community would share responsibility for success. The signature features of a UD education were thus to be available to every undergraduate (Periodic Review Report to Middle States, 2006, p. 37).

The following University of Delaware ten goals for undergraduate education were adopted by the Faculty Senate in March 2000:

1. Attain effective skills in (a) oral and (b) written communication, (c) quantitative reasoning, and (d) the use of information technology
2. Learn to think critically to solve problems.
3. Be able to work and learn both independently and collaboratively.
4. Engage questions of ethics and recognize responsibilities to self, community, and society at large.
5. Understand the diverse ways of thinking that underlie the search for knowledge in the arts, humanities, sciences and social sciences.

6. Develop the intellectual curiosity, confidence, and engagement that will lead to lifelong learning.
7. Develop the ability to integrate academic knowledge with experiences that extend the boundaries of the classroom.
8. Expand understanding and appreciation of human creativity and diverse forms of aesthetic and intellectual expression.
9. Understand the foundations of United States society including the significance of its cultural diversity.
10. Develop an international perspective in order to live and work effectively in an increasingly global society.

In the Periodic Review Report to Middle States (2006), it is noted that “The Faculty Senate, the Provost and the deans recommended that all undergraduate students should benefit from campus-wide implementation of the General Education Initiative. In fall 2004, the University’s Board of Trustees endorsed the Faculty Senate’s resolution for full implementation of new general education requirements” (p. 38). In the formal curriculum, the University addressed the ten general education goals through the First Year Experience and Discovery Learning Experience requirements, course emphasis on oral and written communication, information literacy and quantitative reasoning, and Capstone Experience offerings.

Following years of review, in November of 2014, the University of Delaware Faculty Senate unanimously approved the motion to replace the former ten general education goals with a statement of purposes for the general education program and five general education objectives (University of Delaware, Regular Meeting of the University Faculty Senate Official Minutes, November, 2014).

Purposes for the University of Delaware's general education program are stated follows:

We seek to prepare students who are:

- Engaged citizens, involved in the world around them, and who understand the major challenges and debates of the day;
- Aware of their intellectual strengths and interests and of their ethical values and commitments;
- Capable of interpreting the arts and culture of contemporary and past societies; and
- Equipped with the essential skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving world including the ability to be a lifelong learner, creator, and innovator.

The Faculty Senate adopted the following five objectives for general education for all University of Delaware students.

General education at the University of Delaware prepares students who are able to:

1. Read critically, analyze arguments and information, and engage in constructive ideation.
2. Communicate effectively in writing, orally, and through creative expression.
3. Work collaboratively and independently within and across a variety of cultural contexts and a spectrum of differences.
4. Critically evaluate the ethical implications of what they say and do.
5. Reason quantitatively, computationally, and scientifically.

In addition, two related resolutions called for an implementation plan and charged the General Education Committee to “develop an assessment plan whereby the University of Delaware can track student progress toward meeting the UD General

Education Objectives” (University of Delaware, Regular Meeting of the University Faculty Senate Official Minutes, November, 2014).

Student Life Connection to General Education

What is the Division of Student Life connection to General Education? The answers to this question are not simple. The general education goals at the University of Delaware were written by faculty members with the primary focus on classroom instruction and approved by the Faculty Senate. A review of publically accessible University documents referencing general education and presentations by University leaders demonstrate clearly expressed academic references, but only very loose mentions of any contributions the out-of-class experience can make toward the student mastery of the general education competencies.

As discussed in the Statement of Problem, the 2011 accreditation special topics committee focusing on “A Diverse and Stimulating Undergraduate Academic Environment” identified two recommendations for “Effective Integration of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs”, which are the focus of this project. The recommendations express a shift in the scope of responsibility toward addressing general education goals and not only include the Division of Student Life units but also articulate an obligation to collaboratively engage in assessment efforts in general education. Academic units are still the priority leaders in student learning, but general education and student learning are no longer confined exclusively to the classroom, in practice or in the accreditation process. The attainment of the general education competencies is the responsibility of

every campus unit that asserts contributions to student learning. Whether the Division of Student Life has any role or credentials to be involved with general education or student learning whatsoever has been a heated agenda on the University of Delaware campus. University of Delaware Division of Student Life, and in particular the Office of Residence Life, has faced intense scrutiny for its educational strategies (Wood, 2008). The report recommendations pose serious issues to consider as well as significant implications.

Before resigning to a simplistic response “because Middle States requires it” and “the self-study committee recommended it,” what are the indicators that the Division of Student Life, on the University of Delaware campus, should in fact have a role in student learning and general education? The first indicator can be found on the University organizational chart. The Division of Student Life could easily fall under the administrative services branch of the institution, as is found on many campuses. In the case of the University of Delaware, the Division of Student Life reports directly to the Provost who oversees all educational affairs and academic units. By the nature of reporting to the Provost, it can be implied that the Division of Student Life is a part of the campus-wide educational process. In addition, the Provost at the time of the study expressed a commitment to establishing a University culture in which all professionals have a mutual responsibility and accountability for student learning. During the 2010 assessment retreat, Provost Apple specifically addressed one of the key strategic milestones and accreditation special topics “A Diverse and Stimulating Undergraduate Academic Environment.” In his opinion, “that means General Education...and

measuring how well we are doing in Gen Ed.” He further added that this priority is something the University community will “need to embrace” and stressed that we “want to institutionalize the assessment of student learning” (2010, February 5). Two past Provosts, Dr. Rich as well as Dr. Apple, expressed this commitment.

A second indicator can be found in the University of Delaware Faculty Senate Resolution from March 13, 2000. The resolution lists seventeen members of the Committee on General Education. An Office of Residence Life representative is listed as one of the members of the Committee on General Education. From the initial resolution, the Office of Residence Life had voting privileges on general education matters and was viewed as having a role in student learning and general education. In the more recent general education review in 2015, the Executive Director of Residence Life & Housing was again an active member of the University Faculty Senate General Education Committee.

Finally, countless professionals within the Division of Student Life verbally articulate the variety of ways in which they contribute to student learning via daily practices. These contributions often remain undocumented and without assessment strategies, and therefore are not recognized as valid in an academic arena and accreditation processes. There appears to be a high level of support and expectations for the Division of Student Life to complement general education directly and measurably. It is not likely that the Division of Student Life can take a direct role in all five general education objectives. Some general education objectives are challenging to address comprehensively in the classroom alone. Similarly, the Division of Student Life units are

not well suited to make direct contributions to each of the five general education objectives. Deciding which of the five general education objectives are the most appropriate for clear contributions of the out-of-class experience allows the Division to most effectively focus resources and display contributions to institutional priorities. Providing specific recommendations for identifying appropriate general education objectives and assessing contributions to student learning within the Division of Student Life domain is an objective of this project.

Accreditation can be viewed as a major opportunity toward continuous self-improvement rather than meeting minimum requirements. It is an affirmation of best practices by peer reviewers. Peer best practices can also be a guide for future policy development. At the time of the last Middle States accreditation review, the Division of Student Life at the University of Delaware was emerging from many years without senior leadership positions filled. The Division was still at a foundation building stage and certainly not prepared to make tangible contributions in the accreditation effort. Now that the Division has had time to more fully develop its senior leadership structure, and has added a full time Director level position focused on assessment, it is better positioned to develop a plan for a more robust participation in the next self-study. The two recommendations articulated by the self-study team relevant to the Division of Student Life provide a tremendous opportunity for clearly establishing its direction as the Division shapes its future role within the University.

Accreditation Process at the University of Delaware

What does the process of measuring what we value look like on the University of Delaware campus? The University of Delaware was first accredited by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education in 1921 and its latest reaccreditation review was successfully completed in 2011.

In response to the 2002 updates to accreditation requirements placing strong emphasis on institutional assessment and assessment of student learning, the University leadership began establishing practices toward assessing student learning. The 2006 Periodic Review Report to Middle States expressed that “The University is in the process of developing, implementing and institutionalizing a University-wide student learning outcomes assessment program. The student outcomes assessment program has one central goal: to create a University of Delaware culture of continuous academic improvement that is focused upon student learning” (p. 73). Specific effort was devoted to institutionalizing the University commitment to student learning assessment and systemizing support. “The University of Delaware’s commitment to student learning outcomes assessment is institutionalized through two new entities – the Educational Assessment Council and the Office of Educational Assessment – as well as through the Center for Teaching Effectiveness and the Faculty Senate” (Periodic Review Report to Middle States, p. 74). The primary role of the Office of Educational Assessment would be to work with campus departments on programmatic assessment.

In addition to institutionalizing the assessment effort through the listed offices, the former Provost, Dr. Rich, conducted meetings and presentations with a variety of offices,

including student life units, highlighting the critical importance of assessing student learning at every level and the need for each campus unit to contribute to student learning. The Office of Residence Life professionals, for example, were able to engage with the Provost in a direct dialogue about the University priorities and potential contributions the department could make toward the University goals as well as accreditation needs. At this stage, despite the Provost's investment into institutionalizing a campus-wide commitment, assessment of student learning was viewed almost exclusively as the purview of the academic units. It should also be noted that in the accreditation processes in 2001 and 2006, the University was reviewed based on all 14 standards described by the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Following the five-year accreditation review cycle, the University was scheduled to complete a peer-review in the spring of 2011. In preparation, campus-wide committees were formed to gather, review, and thoroughly analyze available and relevant campus data. The committees took the process of assessment and cross-disciplinary dialogue toward the process of ongoing improvement of the entire institution very seriously. In this cycle, the self-study review took a slightly different approach than reviewing all 14 standards, which would be considered typical. As Dr. Michael Middaugh, former University of Delaware Associate Provost and Chair of Middle States Commission on Higher Education, explained to the self-study teams during an initial meeting on January 9, 2009, and again reiterated to the University of Delaware community during an assessment retreat on February 5, 2010, University of Delaware is considered a "model, in many ways, for other institutions" to follow in the accreditation

process. Since the University meets all 14 standards, the 2011 self-study does not follow the “full comprehensive review of all 14 standards that many universities do”, but instead the University decided to “use the self-study process as an opportunity to focus on real initiatives that are important to us” and use the special topics approach.

The three areas identified as core priorities for the self-study are: A Diverse and Stimulating Undergraduate Academic Environment, A Premier Research and Graduate University, and Excellence in Professional Education (Middaugh, 2009). The three special topics are among the six milestones the University identified in its Path to Prominence™ (Appendix F). As Dr. Middaugh further stressed, each department should have an articulated mission statement toward student learning and clearly articulated programmatic outcomes. Accrediting teams specifically looked for undergraduate program outcomes linked to general education goals. In addition, it is not only critical to assess general education goals, but also to use the assessment to improve programs and processes (Middaugh, 2010, February 5).

The commitment to assessing the learning that occurs at the University of Delaware goes beyond this accreditation cycle and is expressed at the highest levels of the institution. In order to generate an institution-wide commitment to the complex process of assessing student learning, the then Provost, Dr. Tom Apple, addressed the campus community during an assessment retreat (2010, February 5). He noted that “assessment is absolutely essential and part of everything that we do.” Dr. Apple reminded the audience that as we look at advancing the Path to Prominence priorities, “assessment is really the best way to improve that which we do.” He stressed that “we

want to transform our students' lives...”, that “we do that by becoming an engaged University” and “we will know if we have arrived in being an engaged University through assessment.”

In the years since the last accreditation report, the University of Delaware has experienced significant turnover in its institutional leadership. The next periodic review report has been scheduled for 2016 and a full self-study evaluation will take place in 2021 (University of Delaware, Institutional Research and Effectiveness). Dr. Dennis Assanis will assume the presidency of the University of Delaware in June 2016. His philosophies will no doubt have impact on future approaches to the institutional accreditation process and expectations of all units. Whether Dr. Assanis and current provost Dr. Grasso consider the Division of Student Life as having the potential to tangibly contribute to student learning and thus the accreditation process is unknown. There appears to be an opportunity for the Division of Student Life to demonstrate capacity.

Accreditation and Evolving Priorities

Accreditation has played an essential role in providing an external analysis of educational claims made by an institution or an educational program. The process gives the taxpayers and those who depend upon the skill set of a college graduate the confidence necessary to attribute value to the degree credentials. Nationally recognized regional accreditation distinguishes between the credentials offered by the peer-reviewed Pennsylvania State University educational system and Glenn Beck University, for

example. Although the accreditation process in the United States is considered to have a vital role, it is not without its critics, and has been evolving to address contemporary national needs. The Middle States Commission on Higher Education (2003) discusses the current focus as follows:

The emerging focus on student learning has created new challenges for regional institutional accreditation. The diversity of America's colleges and universities provides a public access to higher education unequalled anywhere in the world. Thus commissions have largely avoided dictating what the learning outcomes of individual institutions ought to be. Instead of insisting on blind compliance to standardized learning goals, they have promulgated quality standards which, in addition to assessing institutional capacity, also assess the congruence between an institution's mission and learning goals, its curricular offerings, and student learning outcomes. They also require institutions to use student learning data to enhance organizational self-reflection, and to show how they have used these data to improve their educational programs. In essence, they ask institutions to be clear about their mission and educational purposes, and to demonstrate how well they are accomplishing these purposes. In this way accreditation is able to focus on the quality of student learning without specifying, beyond general categories, what that learning should be – in short, to promote *standards* without *standardization* (p. 1).

In order to provide context for this project, it is of value to briefly review the accreditation process and the standards most applicable to potential articulations of contributions to student learning by student affairs. There are six regional accreditation agencies/associations for higher education within the United States. Accreditation information is considered to be public knowledge and each association makes a wealth of information available to the public via a web site – publications, accreditation standards, resources, as well as a listing of all institutions under the association umbrella and their accreditation status. University of Delaware falls within the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, "...the unit of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools that accredits degree-granting colleges and universities in the Middle States

region, which includes Delaware, the District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, and several locations internationally” (www.msche.org), and currently consists of 521 member institutions. The commission is “a voluntary, non-governmental, membership association that is dedicated to quality assurance and improvement through accreditation via peer evaluation” (www.msche.org), guided by ten core values, including a focus on student learning and effective teaching.

To guide higher education institutions through the accreditation process, the commission outlines and discusses in detail fourteen standards that accredited institutions must meet (refer to Appendix E for a full listing of all fourteen standards). The first seven standards focus on institutional context and conclude with institutional assessment. The remaining seven standards focus on educational effectiveness and place a strong emphasis on assessment of student learning. Assessment did not historically play such a strong role in the accreditation process, but in recent years has gained a central focus:

In 2002, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education introduced updated accreditation standards that simplified requirements for resources and processes and concentrated instead on *assessment*: evidence that the institution is achieving its goals. Every accreditation standard now includes an assessment component; the assessment of student learning is addressed in Standard 14 (Assessment of Student Learning); and the assessment of *all* key institutional goals, including those assessed in the other thirteen standards, is addressed holistically in Standard 7 (Institutional Assessment). (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2005, p. 3).

The 2002 updates to the accreditation standards are very pertinent to not only academic departments but student affairs units as well. The accrediting commission is now looking for specific evidence of how each department contributes to the institutional

mission, and since “student learning is at the heart of the mission of most institutions of higher education, the assessment of student learning is an essential component of the assessment of institutional effectiveness” (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006, p. 63). Standard 14, Assessment of Student Learning, includes “co-curricular programs”, and requires:

1. Developing clearly articulated *learning outcomes*: the knowledge, skills, and competencies that students are expected to exhibit upon successful completion of a course, academic program, co-curricular program, general education requirement, or other specific set of experiences;
 2. Offering courses, programs, and experiences that provide purposeful *opportunities for students to achieve those learning outcomes*;
 3. *Assessing student achievement* of those learning outcomes; and
 4. *Using the results* of those assessments to improve teaching and learning and inform planning and resource allocation decisions.
- (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2005, p. 3)

Standard 9, Student Support Services, narrows down the focus of student affairs units toward supporting “learning of all students in the context of the institution’s mission and chosen educational delivery system” (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2006, p. 34). Assessment of student learning in all aspects of the college experience is a core component of Institutional Effectiveness, Standard 7, and also plays a vital role in institutional Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal, as described in Standard 2.

Of interest to student affairs units are also the specific questions that the commission and its representatives look for during the peer-review process:

Evaluation team members, reviewers, and Commissioners might look for information on the following questions in an institution’s assessment documentation:

1. Do institutional leaders support and value a culture of assessment?

2. Are goals, including learning outcomes, clearly articulated at every level?
 3. Have appropriate assessment processes been implemented?
 4. Have appropriate assessment processes been planned?
 5. Do assessment results provide convincing evidence?
 6. Have assessment results been shared?
 7. Have results led to appropriate decisions?
 8. Have assessment processes been reviewed?
 9. Where does the institution appear to be going with assessment?
- (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2007, p. 57-58)

The Middle States Commission on Higher Education does not refine its accreditation standards in a vacuum. Many stakeholders in the United States engage in the national conversation of quality and standards in higher education. Leading scholars, such as Kuh, Kinzie, Buckley, Bridges, and Hayek (2007) state that:

In this era of No Child Left Behind, higher education is being asked how it can be more accountable. How do we know that college students are learning what we hope they are learning? More important, do we know what we hope they are learning? Both of these questions are difficult to answer, but if we do not answer them, someone else will. Case in point: Secretary of Education Spelling's final report of the Commission on the Future of Higher Education suggests the need for universal outcome measures for institutions of higher education – a scary prospect” (p. xiii).

The national debate about appropriate standards in higher education and the response of colleges, universities, and accreditation agencies to measure student learning was in many ways prompted by a sharp critique published in 2006 by the US Department of Education through a commission appointed by the Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings, *A Test of Leadership: Charting the Future of U.S. Higher Education*.

Learning

As other nations rapidly improve their higher education systems, we are disturbed by evidence that the quality of student learning at U.S. colleges and universities is inadequate and, in some cases, declining. A number of recent studies highlight the shortcomings of postsecondary institutions in everything from graduation rates

and time to degree to learning outcomes and even core literacy skills. According to the most recent National Assessment of Adult Literacy, for instance, the percentage of college graduates deemed proficient in prose literacy has actually declined from 40 to 31 percent in the past decade. These shortcomings have real-world consequences. Employers report repeatedly that many new graduates they hire are not prepared to work, lacking the critical thinking, writing and problem-solving skills needed in today's workplaces. In addition, business and government leaders have repeatedly and urgently called for workers at all stages of life to continually upgrade their academic and practical skills (p. 3).

Transparency and Accountability

We believe that improved accountability is vital to ensuring the success of all the other reforms we propose. Colleges and universities must become more transparent about cost, price, and student success outcomes, and must willingly share this information with students and families. Student achievement, which is inextricably connected to institutional success, must be measured by institutions on a "value-added" basis that takes into account students' academic baseline when assessing their results. This information should be made available to students, and reported publicly in aggregate form to provide consumers and policymakers an accessible, understandable way to measure the relative effectiveness of different colleges and universities (p. 4).

The concerns expressed by the commission appointed by Margaret Spellings have not disappeared from the political discussion since her departure from office in 2008. In a speech discussed in the September 28, 2010 journal *Inside Higher Ed*, President Obama expressed a concern about the rising cost of higher education, and expressed a critique of the continuous growth of services and luxuries that drive up cost for students, when the core focus and priority of higher education is on learning. It can be implied that the focus of many campuses on entertainment and services that drives up cost of student fees and tuition will be questioned and potentially scrutinized by federal administrators, if not immediately in the near future. The authors of the article noted that President Obama sent a message to college leaders that he is "closely watching their soaring prices" and to "figure out what is driving all this huge inflation in the cost of higher education, because

this is actually the only place where inflation is higher than health care inflation.”

President Obama further states that “You’re not going to a university to join a spa; you’re going there to learn...and if all the amenities of a public university start jacking up the cost of tuition significantly, that’s a problem.” In the president’s message, value is given to those aspects of the college and university experience that directly support student learning (Lederman & Epstein, 2010). In a similar tone, Lederman quoted Arne Duncan, the Secretary of Education, stating that “With lower-cost community colleges gaining in stature and colleges experimenting with three-year degrees and ‘no frills’ campuses, he said, ‘smart consumers’ will stop going to schools where costs are skyrocketing” (2009). In November 2015, the White House and the US Department of Education published executive actions and legislative proposals to “increase transparency and promote outcomes-driven accountability under current law” (Muñoz, 2015). In 2014, following 18 months of review, the Middle States Commission on Higher Education published a revised set of standards for accreditation in response to evolving needs, which outlines seven standards instead of the original fourteen standards (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2014).

In addition to political pressures and accreditation requirements, many other stakeholders are engaging in the debate about evolving priorities of higher education. The issues are clearly expressed by Weinberg (2005) in an article *An Alternative to the Campus as Club Med*:

Jacuzzis and multimedia theaters, juice bars and hot tubs, sports centers and coffee shops -- they are increasingly part of the college landscape as higher-education institutions seek to attract more students by offering ever-fancier facilities and frills. But in our relentless quest to woo undergraduates, are we

creating climates in which our academic programs can thrive and our students can learn? Or are our campuses becoming simply mini-versions of Club Med? Colleges could significantly increase the depth and breadth of student learning if they dropped out of the amenities arms race and instead became more intent on capturing the educational moments that take place outside the classroom. We need to ask some tough questions about the student-affairs programs on our campuses....Too many colleges have become obsessed with providing the newest and most-lavish services and amenities to keep up with the competition, diverting resources away from other, more valuable educational programs. In addition, by hiring so many trained professionals, we have robbed students of opportunities to learn through their own problem solving. We have encouraged a sense of entitlement among them, so that they increasingly view themselves as clients that our institutions are obliged to serve -- isolated individuals with problems to be fixed -- rather than members of a community who work together to develop solutions (2005).

It begs the question for many stakeholders – are student affairs units an unnecessary frill, luxuries raising costs, or are they vital components of the learning process toward achieving the overall goals of undergraduate education? The priorities of our national leadership and accrediting agencies have evolved and the raised issues as well as clearly articulated priorities are highly relevant to the student affairs realm. Priority is given to student learning, not care taking and entertainment, and as resources become scarce and pressures rise, all units in the higher education system will be called to demonstrate, in a measurable manner, a clear contribution to the core purpose of higher education, which is student learning. As expressed by an expert in assessment in student affairs, Marilee Bresciani (2009), “Much of the focus of the accreditation process historically focused on the classroom. In recent years, however, a shift toward considering the in-class and out-of-class learning environment has resulted in more of a holistic look at student learning and development” (p. 25). Bresciani further references the work of Upcraft and Schuh

(1996) asserting that “assessment has moved from the ‘nice to have if you can afford it’ category to the ‘you better have it if you want to get accredited’ category” (p. 7).

Student learning is the articulated measure of success for all units within higher education. According to Hernon and Dugan (2004), higher education institutions have a long history of reporting on outcomes. They critique these outcomes, though, as in reality being outputs, specifically listing “graduation rates, retention rates, transfer rates, and employment rates for a graduating class” (p. xvi). Hernon and Dugan note that accreditation agencies are now “saying that such measures are insufficient; institutions of higher education must set student learning outcomes, provide evidence that those outcomes have been achieved, and use the evidence gathered to improve, in an ongoing manner, educational quality” (p. xvi). When measuring learning, David Garvin (1998) states that it has been “long known that ‘if you can’t measure it, you can’t manage it.’ This maxim is as true of learning as it is of any other corporate objective” (p. 70). As all campus units, including student affairs, strive to address current accreditation priorities, it will be of critical importance to measure what the university truly values, as articulated in its mission, values, and general education goals for student learning. The spirit of the exercise will be key. While meeting accreditation requirements is critical, the most important rationale for joining the institution-wide assessment process of student learning is because it is the right thing to do for improving the educational experience of students and because it has high potential for improving the entire institution.

Chapter 3

METHODS OF DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

The methodology chapter outlines the specific approaches that were applied during the research process and throughout the analysis of the information gathered from subjects in the study. This project is a qualitative study of best practices in aligning student affairs assessment with institutional assessment of general education, both of which support institutional accreditation improvement goals. The intent was to look outside the University of Delaware campus to identify and analyze practices and approaches of institutions that have a long-standing track record of success in student affairs assessment, review literature to ensure that the identified institutional practices are supported by best practices recommended by national experts, and to analyze the findings with the aim to potentially adapt some of the model practices within the Division of Student Life on the University of Delaware campus. The overall improvement goal of this study is to propose applicable and productive practices for strengthening and improving the Division of Student Life assessment efforts, and as a result, strengthening the Division's role in supporting institutional priorities.

The use of the term “best practices” in this study is not intended to imply that the practice under discussion is the unequivocally proven top performer within U.S. higher education student affairs programs. Rather, the term “best practices” is intended to denote

leading practices recommended by a collection of prominent authors, practitioners, and experts from student affairs and higher education. Their applied approaches with observable results can be used as benchmarks for other institutions. The term “good practice” or “best practice” is often used by student affairs scholars when describing a set of principles that guide student affairs work (AAHE, 1996; ACPA & NASPA, 1997; Baxter Magolda, 1999b; Blimling, Whitt, & Associates, 1999; Martin & Samels, 2001) or that can provide “examples of promising practices that could be adapted and used profitably at other institutions” (Kuh et al., 2005, p. 18).

Multiple institutions were considered and three institutions, identified among models on the stated topic, ultimately accepted an invitation to participate in this study. The specific methods used included an in-depth review and analysis of public and internal institutional documents spanning up to ten years, formal interviews with executive leaders of identified model institutions, and a review of supporting literature. Prior to drafting recommendations, interviews were conducted with University of Delaware executive leaders who were in their positions at the time this study was conducted to verify feasibility and applicability of findings to the University of Delaware campus. Internal University of Delaware Division of Student Life documents were reviewed to tailor recommendations to existing internal practices. Each method will be further discussed in specific detail.

The following questions guided the direction and boundaries of this study.

- How are model institutions approaching the process of assessing student learning in the out-of-class domain toward meeting their general education goals?
- Are the selected model institutional processes of assessing student learning in the out-of-class domain for meeting their general education goals supported by best practices recommended in literature?
- What opportunities exist for the University of Delaware Division of Student Life to make assessable contributions to general education?

Table 3.1 displays a data collection matrix, which organizes the methods of data collection and analysis employed to address each question.

Table 3.1: Data Collection Matrix

GUIDING QUESTION	DATA COLLECTION METHOD	DATA SOURCE	ACTIVITY AND DATA ANALYSIS
How are model institutions approaching the process of assessing student learning in the out-of-class domain toward meeting their general education goals?	Document review	Accreditation reports, strategic plans, strategic plan reports, assessment plans, assessment plan reports, learning outcomes, institutional web sites, internal documents	Detailed study and analysis of institutional documents – public and internal
	Interviews	Institutional Representatives: Vice President/Vice Chancellor, Director of Assessment, Director of Institutional Research, Student Life leaders, nationally recognized assessment experts	Interviews with 2 to 5 institutional leaders in each of the three model institutions selected for the study
Are the selected model institutional processes of assessing student learning in the out-of-class domain for meeting their general education goals supported by best practices recommended in literature?	Literature review	Books, journals, Association publications, conference presentations, accreditation agency requirements, etc.	Review literature to verify themes that emerged during interviews and institutional document analysis; review for congruence and consistency of recommended practices
What opportunities exist for the University of Delaware Division of Student Life to make assessable contributions to general education?	Document Review	UD accreditation report, Student Life strategic plan, UD general education goals, Student Life learning domains, Student Life assessment documents, assessment meeting agendas, CampusLabs record, etc.	Review of relevant institutional documents and documented practices – public and internal – to identify opportunities for improvement based on previously identified best practices
	Interviews	University of Delaware executive leadership	Interview with UD executive leaders who have direct insight and influence

Design of the Study

I selected a qualitative approach to this study due to the complexity of the topic as well as the type of information that I was seeking. My primary goal was to seek understanding rather than quantifiable results. Throughout the research process, I was gathering broad philosophies, approaches that led to successful practices, institutional context, examples, stories, and personal account and interpretation by the study subjects, which cannot be expressed through a more sterile survey approach. Merriam's (2009) discussion of the characteristics of qualitative research support my selection of the study design in stating that the "overall purposes of qualitative research are to achieve an *understanding* of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience" (p. 14). The perspective, opinions, and interpretations of the study subjects were essential to my ability to understand and correctly represent the types of model practices the individual institutions adopted. Merriam (2009) discusses the importance of seeking "the *emic* or insider's perspective, versus the *etic* or outsider's view" (p. 14), and the qualitative design allowed me to view the content from the lens of the subjects and their respective institutions.

Qualitative design also allowed me to explore the process, sequential steps, evolution, and key influential factors that led to the development of specific practices of selected institutions. Maxwell (1996) identifies understanding of "*meaning*" (p. 17), "*context*" (p. 17), "*process*" (p.19), identification of "*unanticipated* phenomena and influences" (p. 19), and development of "*causal explanations*" (p. 20) as specific

strengths and purposes that a qualitative researcher pursues. As discussed in the earlier chapter on background and context for this study, there are political considerations both external and internal that have the capacity to impact the types of practices a specific institution adopts. The process that the selected institutions went through was of equal importance to me as the outcome expressed through the institutional documents and practices.

I utilized multiple approaches to data collection (three-pronged approach) which led to identification of themes and common trends in practices: three separate institutional settings, document reviews, interviews, and verification of findings with existing literature of best practices in student affairs. “Triangulation – collecting information from a diverse range of individuals and settings, using a variety of methods” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 93) is a recommended technique that “reduces the risk of chance associations and of systematic biases due to a specific method and allows a better assessment of the generality of the explanations” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 93-94) the researcher develops. My process of inquiry was inductive in nature, meaning that gathered data led to identification of themes and common trends, and I served as “the primary instrument for data collection and analysis” (Merriam, 2009, p. 15), which Merriam describes as common characteristics of qualitative inquiry. As much as possible, the intent was to provide a “richly descriptive” (Merriam, 2009, p. 16) account of what I learned about specific practices employed by the selected institutions, utilizing examples, quotes, and context-specific detail.

Gaining access to selected institutions and subjects proved to be more challenging than anticipated. This study required Institutional Review Board approval from University of Delaware as well as from each institution I intended to include in this study. A number of restrictions were placed on this study in the process of negotiating permission to conduct interviews with leaders in selected institutions either by the institutional research requirements and/or by the selected subjects. The original research design included site visits and on-campus interviews. A number of institutions do not allow outside researchers to conduct on-site research without a sponsor from their faculty. Permission was granted to conduct phone interviews only. In addition, concerns were raised about protecting the subjects of this study as well as any institutional information that would be shared by interview subjects but that is not readily accessible to the public. I intended to interview very specific leaders in the selected institutions who would be fully identifiable in my findings given the unique position on their campus. As a result, two pre-selected institutions declined participation. I was able to establish approval, with very specific restrictions, with three institutions. Any restrictions put forward by any one of the institutions were applied to all three.

After a thorough review and communication with Institutional Review Board representatives at University of Delaware as well as other institutions I intended to include in this study, the participant informed consent form was revised to make an explicit statement of confidentiality. Participation was voluntary, and names and specific titles would not be included in the findings. Names of institutions are omitted and institutions are referred to as Institution 1, 2, and 3. Names of subjects were replaced

with a code number for all research records in order to maintain confidentiality and all data was secured on a password protected computer network. A copy of the Informed Consent Form is included in Appendix B. While not all subjects required full anonymity, some expressed that the tight IRB protocol was the only reason they were willing to speak with me in a candid manner on their institutional context, political factors, processes, and the rationale behind their practices. Schuh speaks to ethical considerations when conducting qualitative research, specifically involving individuals of authority, so that no individual and their opinions and perspectives can be identified in the report. “Those responsible for conducting the assessment need to be sure that data can never be traced to specific individuals and that final reports are crafted in such a way that no one ever suffers from participating” (Schuh, 2009, p. 194). The foundation of this study was to seek understanding of institutional practices. The restrictions and parameters set forth became essential to the subjects’ candid and open disclosure and to my ability to complete this study in good faith, balancing foreseeable risks and benefits to participants. In the Findings section of this study report, participants are referred to utilizing the following descriptors in parentheses following quotations and paraphrased narrative:

- Director/Vice President/senior leader of institutional research, enrollment management and/or educational/academic assessment (IR/EA)
- Vice President (or equivalent title) in student affairs division (VPSA)
- Director of student affairs assessment (DSAA)
- Director/Assistant Vice President/senior leader of student affairs unit (DSAU)

In addition, general education statements at all three institutions are referred to as “general education goals” as opposed to the specific name/terminology each institution uses.

The limitation of these conditions means that the reader of this study report will be unable to make further investigative attempts. The benefit is that under a signed agreement of complete anonymity the study participants provided candid, unguarded, and comprehensive responses and gave me access to institutional records that are not readily available to the general public. This was a study of best practices, and as such, institutional names are less important for reporting purposes than the comprehensive analysis of the institutional approaches that lead to organizational growth and improvement.

Sample Selection

Purposeful sampling was utilized in the selection of specific institutions as well as the specific professionals within the selected institutions for interview purposes.

“Purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (Merriam, 2009, p. 77). I was seeking institutions that directly support the purpose of this study. The specific selection criteria included: a long-standing track record of success in student affairs assessment, evidence of aligning student affairs assessment with institutional assessment of general education, and indicators of student affairs support of institutional accreditation improvement goals. Institutional

demographic factors (e.g., institutional size, student body, public vs. private, four-year, research based) were considered in order to ensure comparability to University of Delaware, and any institution that fit the purposeful sampling criteria but would not compare to University of Delaware (e.g., small private liberal arts colleges and universities) was omitted from consideration.

A number of institutions were considered for the purpose of exploring best practices in the student affairs profession. In order to identify institutions that could be used as models for their work in connecting student affairs contributions to attainment of general education goals, recommendations were sought from several sources. For institutions within the Middle States accreditation region, recommendations were requested from the acting Chair of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education, Dr. Michael Middaugh. The Commission has an intimate insight into each aspect of an accredited college or university programmatic and assessment efforts and was deemed a highly credible source. For institutions outside the Middle States accreditation area, I sought advice from Dr. Marilee Bresciani, a national author and frequent presenter at national conferences on her research on outcome-based assessment of learning in student affairs. Dr. Bresciani conducts research on a number of campuses and has an intimate knowledge of the assessment efforts of numerous institutions. In addition, I reviewed literature for references to specific institutional programs. Institutional approaches and examples of application of best practices at specific colleges and universities are often highlighted by national authors and presenters. Institutional references in literature and at national conference presentations (ACPA Convention, NASPA Convention, AAC&U

Annual Conference, and the IUPUI Assessment Institute) were reviewed thoroughly when making selection choices.

A number of options were presented by the Chair of the Middle States Commission on Higher Education and/or national researchers for colleges and universities that are progressing on successful assessment of student affairs contributions to student learning in the out-of-class domain. I chose a comprehensive qualitative analysis of a small number of institutions over a more general research approach of a large number of institutions. Given the specific criteria of assessing student learning in the out-of-class domain for meeting general education goals, five institutions were identified as models to study. The selected institutions are demographically comparable to the University of Delaware, have been cited in literature for their assessment practices, and their representatives have regularly contributed presentations at regional accrediting meetings, assessment institutes, and national professional conferences describing best practices in assessment within Student Life units.

Permission to conduct research was sought from the five selected institutions. Three of the selected institutions were willing participants and granted me access to complete the study, under the specific conditions outlined on the participant Informed Consent Form (Appendix B). Two institutions had to be removed from the study consideration due to access approval limitations and subject choices to decline participation. In order to comply with Institutional Review Board requirements and the institutional conditions under which research permission was granted, names of the institutions that were invited to participate in this study will not be disclosed. For the

purpose of this report, participating colleges and universities will be referred to as Institution 1, Institution 2, and Institution 3. Three accreditation bodies are represented in this study. One institution is an accredited university within the Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU). One institution is an accredited university within the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) – A Commission of the North Central Association. One institution is an accredited university within the Middle States Commission on Higher Education.

Purposeful sampling was also applied to selecting specific individuals within the specified institutions for interview purposes. Individuals were selected based on their specific leadership position within the division of student life, intimate knowledge of student life assessment efforts, and/or coordination role of institutional assessment and accreditation processes. Specific titles of selected subjects varied in each institution, but the selected individuals had specific roles in their institution which included: Vice President/Vice Chancellor of Student Life, Assistant Provost, Vice Provost, Director of Assessment in Student Life, Director of Educational Assessment, Director of Institutional Research, Vice President of Enrollment Management, Assistant Vice President/Director of a unit within Student Life.

Data Collection and Analysis

Document Review

Documents and artifacts played a key role in this research study and document review was the starting point of my inquiry within each of the three selected institutions.

Document review is described as a meaningful form of data collection in qualitative research, similar to interviews and observations (Weiss, 1998; Merriam, 2009). “The data can furnish descriptive information, verify emerging hypotheses, advance new categories and hypotheses, offer historical understanding, track change and development, and so on” (Merriam, 2009, p. 155). Documentary materials are also described as relatively stable and objective given that they are not affected by the interviewer’s presence or study. Documents are “nonreactive, that is, unaffected by the research process. They are product of the context in which they were produced and therefore grounded in the real world” (Merriam, 2009, p. 156). Another advantage of document review is relative ease of access to a wide range of information that would require substantial investment of investigative time to gather otherwise (Merriam, 2009, p. 155). Finally, “A major advantage of documents is that they were written contemporaneously with the events they chronicle, and thus are not subject to memory decay or memory distortion” (Weiss, 1998, p. 260). An obstacle a document review poses to a study is that documents were written with a different purpose in mind than the study agenda and the investigator has to identify relevant information within the wide-ranging content (Weiss, 1998; Merriam, 2009). In general, “Documents of all types can help the researcher uncover meaning, develop understanding, and discover insights relevant to the research problem” (Merriam, 2009, p. 163).

Given the varied documents that any institution develops, I felt the need to develop a screening rubric as the protocol for gathering and selecting data specific to this study from a large volume of documents with varied priorities. The Document Review

Rubric is attached in Appendix C. I sought advice and review of the rubric from a member of my research committee and it was submitted as a component of my Institutional Review Board (IRB) protocol. The rubric served as a helpful tool to keep the document review portion of the study focused. I utilized the rubric for document and artifact review at each of the three institutions for several purposes:

1. document screening to help me identify applicable materials and omit materials that provide helpful background information and context but are outside the scope of this study
2. note taking throughout the document review process for each component of the rubric
3. analysis of indicators
4. gathering of questions I wanted to ask during interviews

For the purpose of this study, a multitude of documents was accessed and/or requested for review. The primary documents included: web pages (student affairs main web page, individual web pages of student life units), institutional mission and goals, student life statements of mission and goals, learning outcomes (student life and supporting units or programs), programmatic efforts that support general education in the out-of-class area, available student life reports (planning reports, assessment reports, end of the year reports, etc.), strategic plans (institutional as well as student life), accreditation reports spanning two accreditation cycles, syllabi of first year seminar courses, and other relevant materials the institutional leaders were able to provide.

Several additional documents were sent to me following interviews with participants as a result of the interview conversation. My document review included documents accessible to the public as well as internal documents that were utilized for planning and internal communication purposes. An average of approximately 500 pages per institution were examined.

I completed review and analysis of all publically accessible and relevant (utilizing the document review rubric) documents prior to initiating interviews which followed. It was important to me to be respectful of the time of the institutional leaders I interviewed, and I wished to maximize the use of the time during the interview. I also believed that my interview subjects would be more willing to engage in a deeper and more detailed conversation if I was able to demonstrate knowledge of their institutional priorities and materials, as much as was feasible to acquire from the perspective of an outsider to their organization. For each of the three institutions, I compiled and organized the document data into categories that emerged from my initial review and that I wished to investigate further. My data management process included both printed document organization as well as electronic organization when the files were too large to print. I kept each institution separate. Within each institution, the process of identifying categories and themes was ongoing and evolved as I acquired more information throughout the study. For each institution, I developed a list of specific questions I wished to pursue during the interviews – for clarification purposes, deeper understanding, institutional context, and/or to verify the accuracy of my interpretation of the document data.

Document review played a key role during the interviews, and the interviews also served as an important aspect of my document analysis. On several occasions during the interviews, I and the interview subject pulled up the documents together, or referenced them for specific content, and discussed their tone, purpose, origins, authors, historical context, any political considerations within campus culture, use and distribution, future plans, and any other records or efforts that are connected to them. This process led to identification and sharing of several other documents the interview subjects sent me via e-mail. In addition, I identified a few documents that I incorrectly discounted in my initial review but were identified as relevant aspects to my study by the interview subjects, and I added the materials back to my study. I was able to ask clarification questions and verify my perceptions, which led to further understanding of the messages expressed in the written documents than I would be able to gain on my own. My assumption was correct in that my thorough document review prior to interviews led to more candor and detail during the interview process as it was evident that I had studied the schools and my questions were both general as well as specific.

All documents were fully traceable to each institution throughout the data collection and analysis, and public as well as internal documents were combined. It was not feasible to replace institutional identifiers in institutional documents. Documents were kept in a locked filing cabinet in my office and/or at my off campus house. Electronic files were secured on a password protected computer network. After data analysis was completed, I removed names of institutions and replaced them with Institution 1, Institution 2, and Institution 3 for reporting purposes.

Interviews

After document review, interviews became the core method in this study. According to Merriam (2009), “In all forms of qualitative research, some and occasionally all of the data are collected through interviews...interviewing is sometimes the *only* way to get data” (p. 87-88). Given the complexity of this project and the relatively low number of professionals who have an insight into the problem and can offer specific recommendations, interviews seemed to be the most appropriate method for gathering data. Formal interviews were utilized in this study as “a systemic method for obtaining data” (Weiss, 1998, p. 154).

Throughout the research period, I contacted potential participants via email and asked them to offer their professional expertise and experience to my project. All potential participants were sent the same letter (Appendix A), which introduced the purpose of my study, provided context to University of Delaware, and listed the project goals. The initial interview request was sent to two specific individuals in each selected institution: the professional in the top leadership role within the Division of Student Life (identifiable on an organizational chart) and the professional responsible for coordinating assessment efforts within the Division of Student Life (each selected institution has an assessment office within Student Life). In Institution 1, Institution 2, as well as Institution 3, these two professionals agreed to participate in this study, which provided a consistent and comparable baseline for analysis of interview findings. In addition, these Student Life leaders also recommended additional professionals within their institution to participate in the study and helped me connect with them.

Study participants received a copy of the Informed Consent Form (Appendix B) and I collected their signed agreement prior to scheduling an interview. All participants in the study gave me permission to audio record the interviews. All formal interviews were conducted over the phone and were scheduled for sixty minutes. I facilitated and recorded all interviews without any additional assistance. Interview protocol is attached in Appendix D. Each formal interview began with my introduction, my background and interest in the topic, purpose of the study, brief overview of the recommendations for Student Life at the University of Delaware in the latest Middle States self-study, the process and criteria I used in selecting their institution, and an overview of the goals of this study. I shared with the study subjects that I had already conducted a document review of accessible materials for their institution, stating examples of specific documents, and that I would be asking them a combination of general as well as highly specific questions regarding their program. I answered any questions about the project prior to starting the interview.

The interview questions followed a combination of open-ended and semi-structured format. Merriam (2009) describes a semi-structured interview format as one in which:

...either all of the questions are more flexibly worded or the interview is a mix of more or less structured questions. Usually, specific information is desired from all the respondents, in which case there is a more structured section to the interview. But the largest part of the interview is guided by a list of questions or issues to be explored, and neither the exact wording nor the order of the questions is determined ahead of time. This format allows the researcher to respond to the situation at hand, to the emerging worldview of the respondent, and to new ideas on the topic (p. 90).

Esterberg (2002) adds that the value of a semi-structured interview “is to explore a topic more openly and to allow interviewees to express their opinions and ideas in their own words” (p. 87). Semi-structured interview format was utilized in the initial two formal interviews in each institution. The interview questions were not asked in the exact order or format as is listed in the interview protocol but the content of each question was covered throughout the natural flow of the interview conversation. The interview questions served as a starting point and a guide. The semi-structured format allowed me to ask follow up and clarification questions. I was also able to add several questions to each interview based on my document review.

Given that the professionals who were interviewed were able to offer a unique insight, perspective, and a set of recommendations for the problem, and given that each professional utilized a different language or lens to describe the issue, an open-ended interviewing approach also seemed appropriate over a more rigid form of a structured interview. According to Weiss (1998):

Open-ended interviewing starts with a list of topics to be covered and a clear sense of what kinds of information are wanted. The interviewer then tells the respondent the topics she is interested in and, with more or less guidance, allows the respondent to tell the story as he wishes... Each interview takes shape differently. Some respondents may discuss program content, others will talk about relationships, still others will focus on program history, and some may concentrate on outcomes. Each person answers in his own terms and offers the information that is salient to him (p. 154).

Open-ended interview format was applicable to additional interviews that I conducted based on referrals to professionals with very specific functional expertise as a supplement to the findings I had already gathered from the primary participants. Open-ended

interview format was also utilized for follow up conversations after the initial interview. A number of the study participants volunteered to be contacted after the initial interview for follow up conversation if I was seeking additional information or a clarification. Additional open-ended follow up interviews were conducted either over the phone or in person when I was able to meet with the study participant(s) at a national convention. I also interacted with the study subjects in follow up conversations via e-mail.

Interviews were captured as audio recordings, utilizing a digital recorder, and audio files were transferred to my password-protected computer and downloaded into Sony Voice Digital Editor 3. Each interview was saved under a code number; no participant names were utilized in research records. I utilized the Voice Digital Editor for all audio data warehousing, transcription purposes, time stamp capture throughout the transcripts, and general organization. Transcriptions of interviews were completed by me and one additional student I hired to assist with the time consuming transcription work load. The transcription assistant was a University of Delaware undergraduate student employee whom I trust with confidential materials and who demonstrated competence in assessment work and transcription accuracy in her employment in my office. I compensated her for her time from personal funds, and she completed the transcriptions outside her employment hours on my personal, password protected, laptop which I issued to her for this purpose, utilizing the Voice Digital Editor program. She included time stamp throughout the transcription, which helped me review and verify her work for accuracy and reference the specific interview details when I needed to go back into the recording to make necessary corrections of wording and concepts she

misunderstood/misheard. The content of the interviews included acronyms and highly specific terminology, unfamiliar to her, which resulted in minor errors that I corrected in my review. The transcriptions that I completed utilized the same Digital Voice Editor 3 program, time stamp capture, and I double checked my work. Follow up communication with research subjects was captured in the form of notes and email communication, which were attached to interview transcripts.

Interview data analysis was conducted on an ongoing basis throughout the research process. Specific highlights, recommendations, and themes emerged from each interview. I kept a separate data organization system for each institution, but I also kept an ongoing journal of emerging common themes across the interviews and across the three institutions. I utilized open coding approach (Merriam, 2009) to identify common themes throughout the data. The coding process did not focus on specific words or phrases, but rather on broader concepts and themes. I did not utilize any computer programs in the inductive coding process. The complexity of the topic, the varied use of terminology across the institutions, and the objective to identify broad common trends made the use of any computer coding software more cumbersome than useful. I explored the possibility of utilizing NVivo, but at the end chose to complete all analysis by hand. As patterns and themes emerged, I continued to revise the number of categories, the names of categories, and I made interpretation of which categories were primary and which would be moved to subheadings. This process is supported by the “category construction” (p. 178) approach discussed by Merriam (2009). At the end of data analysis, decisions also had to be made about which data to omit from the final report.

Research subjects shared information well beyond the subject of this study, and some institutional practices did not emerge as related practices among the selected institutions. The full data set reaches outside and beyond the research aims of this study, and the discussion of findings will focus on the common themes that emerged through the data analysis.

Supporting Literature

The third step in the data collection and analysis process included validating whether the common themes and highlights of best practices that emerged throughout the research process were supported by national experts on the topic. This step addressed validity concerns that may exist by limiting the scope of the study to three sites.

Maxwell (1996) discusses the usefulness of comparison in qualitative research. “There may be a literature on typical settings of the type studied that make it easier to identify the relevant factors in an exceptional case and ascertain their importance” (Maxwell, 1996, p. 96). This study does not validate findings by comparing them to a specific theory (Maxwell, 1996), but comparison of findings to recommendations expressed by professional organizations and national researchers and experts on the topic provides a significant additional insight and a broader generalizable perspective. The literature sources that were utilized included:

- National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA)
recommended practices

- Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) leading practices and recommendations to assessment of general education
- American Association for Higher Education (AAHE) recommended practices
- American College Personnel Association (ACPA) recommended practices
- National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) recommended practices
- Middle States Commission on Higher Education. (2006). *Student Learning Assessment: Options and Resources* (Approaches for Student Affairs professionals)
- Literature on assessment of general education programs and assessment of the out-of-class experience
- Literature on leadership in student affairs

University of Delaware Applicability

The fourth and final step in data collection included a document review and interviews at University of Delaware. Prior to drafting of recommendations, I conducted interviews with two University of Delaware executive leaders (the Provost at the time of this study, and the Vice President for Student Life at the time of this study) to verify feasibility and applicability of findings from the selected institutions, with supporting literature, to the University of Delaware campus. Internal University of Delaware Division of Student Life documents were reviewed to tailor recommendations to existing internal practices. Document review included strategic plans of the Division of Student

Life as well as the eleven units that comprise the Division of Student Life, Student Life learning domains and corresponding learning objectives, assessment plans, assessment reports, and a map of programmatic efforts that support student learning. I also reviewed existing Student Life Assessment Committee processes and resources that support division-wide assessment effort. It was not the objective of this project to study and critically evaluate the University of Delaware Division of Student Life work as it relates to the study topic. After research findings were analyzed and recommendations were in the draft form, this final step of data collection was conducted in order to make the study recommendations as specific, applicable, useful, and tailored to the University of Delaware campus, which is the site from which the problem statement and goals for the study were generated.

I gained access to internal materials through my employment at the University of Delaware in several roles – as the coordinator of assessment efforts for Residence Life and Housing, a member of the Division of Student Life Assessment Team, a member of the most recent accreditation self-study review, and with dialogue and permission from the Vice President of Student Life at the time this study was conducted. Interviews with the Vice President of Student Life and the Provost followed an “unstructured/informal” (Merriam, 2009, p. 89) format with open-ended questions, exploratory in nature, which allowed us to openly discuss the study findings, current institutional practices and plans, test responses and gather feedback on my draft of recommendations, and to gather insight about their general perspective on the study topic. The interviews were captured via notes.

Validity

I applied several strategies in order to address threats to validity throughout this study. Triangulation (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 2009; Schuh, 2009) of the sources of data plays an important role. I purposely selected multiple sources - three separate institutions, interviews, document review, and supporting literature. Member checks (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 2009; Schuh, 2009) were utilized with interview participants at the three institutions. I reviewed my interpretations of document data with them, asked follow up and clarification questions, and I also communicated with several participants about my overall interpretations of the study findings to gather their perspective. I maintained an audit trail (Merriam, 2009; Schuh, 2009) by keeping thorough notes of each step of the study and how I made decisions throughout the analysis of findings. Comparison (Maxwell, 1996) was used to validate consistency of findings with existing literature on the topic. Finally, I attempted to gather rich and descriptive data (Maxwell, 1996; Merriam, 2009; Schuh, 2009) with specific detail, examples, stories, evolution steps the institutions went through to current practices, and describing the institutional context. Weise, R. (1994) speaks to the gains derived from a qualitative study in that “those who do qualitative interview studies invariably wind up knowing a lot about the topic of their study” (p. 11). I aimed to conduct careful and in-depth interviews and a highly attentive review of documents in order to describe the findings truthfully, descriptively, and with the utmost regard to integrity of the process.

Chapter 4

FINDINGS

A qualitative study of three distinct sites naturally led to numerous pathways for presenting and discussing key findings. Presenting such a high volume of information gathered through this study required decisions about a structure to contain and represent the results. It was also crucial to make decisions to include only essential findings that serve as helpful guideposts for the context of this study, and a great deal of interesting and important information had to be omitted.

A separate reporting of the document analysis, interview results, and supporting literature was considered as one way to discuss findings. Ultimately, a convergence approach was selected to discuss findings institution by institution. Data points fall into key themes that organically emerged from the study. Six themes emerged that represent key factors and approaches that led to organizational growth and improvement by the three institutions in this study. Findings will be discussed through the following themes:

1. Aligning common aims and identifying distinctiveness
2. Determining educational capacity
3. Establishing a culture of assessment
4. Achieving a role in the accreditation cycle
5. Developing effective use of technology
6. Establishing partnerships and collaborative efforts

The topics of the discussion spanned several years and addressed an evolution of thinking and of process. As such, efforts were made to display data in a story narrative to best capture the vignettes shared by the subjects. In some cases, it was determined that the use of long quotes over paraphrasing best captured the full content and context of the story.

Finding 1: Aligning Common Aims and Identifying Distinctiveness

Student affairs professionals have not historically been asked or required to demonstrate student learning to sustain their role on campus. The student affairs divisions examined for this study made a conscious decision to connect their own vision for success with that of the general education framework of their respective institutions. In addition, these divisions have worked to develop areas of distinctiveness for student learning in the student affairs arena. For the context of this area of the findings, commitment to student learning will be discussed as the general philosophical underpinnings and critical decisions considered necessary to guide a student affairs division toward making educational contributions in their unique institutional environments.

The approach to alignment by each of the student affairs divisions was unique. Three alignment frameworks coalesced through the data gathering and analysis process. One student affairs division initiated the general education narrative, another elected full adoption of the institution general education statements as the top priority of the division,

and the third quietly, yet intentionally developed a general education focus on the part of the student affairs division as support to faculty. Each of the three paths toward alignment contain useful lessons should the Division of Student Life at University of Delaware elect to more formally connect goals and outcomes to University of Delaware's General Education Objectives.

Institution 1

The student affairs division at Institution 1 created broad education statements in the mid 1980's. At this time the institution did not have general education statements.

We [division of student affairs] had a process where we came up with what we thought the attributes of the ideal [name omitted] University graduates, and that profile has been used as the basis for our redesigned [general education]. It really was for broad learning. It was not just about academic outcomes, but it was also about civic and interpersonal outcomes for which we aspired. In that sense, it was one that really resonated with our work. It sort of embedded some of our values in that (VPSA).

It was evident in the narratives from the participants from Institution 1 that they recognized their path toward alignment was unique but expressed over and over that it was natural and normal for inside and outside the classroom to be considered in concert.

One participant's comments represent common voices from Institution 1: "it is about shared responsibility...and that all people co-construct a learning environment" (VPSA).

When discussing the division of student affairs specifically, the participant noted:

For us to have a sense of what each is contributing to the development of that learning environment is very important. None of us are just our own isolated piece. It's all interrelated and that's one of the ways of showing the interrelated nature of our work, and our shared responsibility for producing these outcomes (VPSA).

At what point the university faculty decided to develop a narrative for the undergraduate core, participants shared that representatives from the student affairs division were able to bring their observations about ways classroom learning can be integrated with the outside the classroom efforts as well as information about student engagement success.

“Fortunate for us, I think, is that a lot of the learning outcome goals around which they designed it; a lot of it came out of work that actually had initially been led by student affairs” (VPSA). The fact that the student affairs division had been assessing student learning outcomes for several years before the [general education] initiative and before the institution began examining broad-based student learning was also cited as a major factor in the alignment of student affairs and academic affairs education priorities. A participant from Institution 1 closed the interview by stating that:

We kind of started on that work before the faculty, because we felt like we had to have something to bring our heads around what is it we wanted the students to learn from us, and we figured we couldn't wait on the faculty to figure that out and get those structures in place. Now that they're doing that, now that we [also] have the learning goals for undergraduates, and we have [general education] learning outcomes, we can begin to align with those. So we don't have a need to stay separate, we just never had anything to align with. Now that we do, we want to align there (DSAA).

Institution 2

Institution 2 also made a conscious decision to connect student affairs division student learning efforts to university general education, but in a completely different manner than Institution 1. Their approach was unique in that the student affairs division decided to work toward alignment by mirroring the general education goals developed by faculty. One participant stated “we have indeed adopted them, truly. We are literally

taking them verbatim and we are aligning our programs and services against them” (DSAA). The decision was prompted in part by the accreditation review process and the student affairs division was faced with the question “what, if anything, are you all doing to look at the assessment of learning?” (DSAA). Leaders in the student affairs division shared that it was viewed as important to align the work of student affairs with the common academic language found in the general education statements of the institution. One of the major benefits offered was a consideration that it is almost more important that “we are aware as to whether or not our students are indeed learning from all of the educational programs that we are doing. ...and, how can we be improving our work based on any feedback we hear from them” (DSAA). The participant also offered:

The more that we can help students make the connection between what they may be doing with us and then how it could impact their classes, that is the key, at least that has been the key for us to help them see what it is that they have learned (DSAA).

The topic of political tension was discussed in the majority of interviews, particularly from the lens of whether student affairs professionals were accepted as having the legitimacy to offer to student learning as stated by general education goals. In the case of Institution 1, tension over such matters seemed antithetical to the culture. Participants from Institution 2 experienced more surprise as represented with comments such as “oh, student affairs wouldn’t care about [general education]...you guys have something to contribute on those?” (DSAA).

It was however noted that some tension existed within the student affairs division on the full adoption of general education statements as divisional student learning

priorities. Comments included “do we really need to adopt a [general education goal], do those really relate to us? I mean, those were developed for the classes; do they really relate, does that make sense for us?” (VPSA). Institution 2 participants discussed that it is the intention of the student affairs division to eventually move toward adapting learning outcomes so that they are “truly owned by student life” (DSAA) but maintain direct alignment with the general education goals. A participant shared:

I think it is critically important that you make a delineation or a clear articulation that there is overlap between student affairs and academic affairs but there is a clear set of goals that, just like from the academic affairs perspective, student affairs can never do. And from the student affairs perspective, there are some things that academic affairs could never do because of the general way we do business. And so, when you are talking to me, the thing that I would caution is that it is vital for people to understand that there are some things that we do that enhance and advance the learning of a student. So, while we want to align with academic affairs, there are some things and steps that we stand on that have to be articulated so that people will begin to understand the work that we do outside of the classroom (VPSA).

The student affairs division developed a bank of assessment questions that were adapted from questions originally written for course evaluations as part of their efforts to align. From the lens of accreditation pressures, a participant noted “student affairs professionals can talk passionately about the work that they do. It is much more difficult to express it in an assessable manner, with clear learning outcome, and with very specific strategic ways” (DSAA).

Participants discussed that prior to 2009, the student affairs division did not have learning goals or learning outcomes narrated. As participants reflected on the adoption of the general education goals, it was referred to as “wise” (VPSA) from the perspective that these goals were already widely accepted on campus, but there was a sentiment that the

general education goals did not fully articulate the work of student affairs. A concern about student affairs losing relevance and distinctiveness was shared in the following manner:

Where my caution is, is that you do not lose yourself into the academic side of the house because then what is your relevance on a campus? I do think that we have very different disciplines, so where people go wrong, in my opinion, is that they blend or mesh what we do in student affairs so closely with what happens in academic affairs that people begin to think, well, we don't need them. We can take a nursing professor and move her over and make her be the associate vice provost for hall management. You are kidding me! What expertise, or professional training, can a nursing faculty bring to this area? It's like, I am going to take the director of housing and make him teach biology. You are kidding me. We have very specific and delineated jobs that require a certain skill set that you just cannot simply give a faculty member because they are a faculty member so they can do this; so you have to be careful in my opinion, not to mesh, melt, or blend what we do so closely because then the relevance of it and the impact becomes null and void. People don't understand the importance of having a student who can mix and mingle in a global society, and they don't get the fact that because we provide opportunities for them to engage socially and understand who they are, the whole issue of self-efficacy...we do those things very intentionally. Where our issue is, with so many professionals in our field, we don't even get what they do and why they do it (VPSA).

The Vice President of student affairs also offered:

Where I am moving this division is that everything we do should support student learning. I do not believe there is one main thing – everything we do should support student learning. In your job, what do you think or expect students should learn about being or working in this environment? You should be able to articulate – students should learn these things. And, then you create or you redirect the experience to match that learning. If it's leadership, if it's service learning, if it is alternative spring break, I don't care what it is, everything we do has learning in it – judicial services, student conduct...there should be learning outcomes.

Institution 3

The approach by the student affairs division at Institution 3 differs from the other two representative institutions in this study. There were no assertions of student affairs leading general education nor were there claims that the work in student affairs paralleled the work done by faculty. Participants were careful to note that student affairs work in student learning could be guided by the general education goals, albeit quietly. It is important to note that the general education goals at Institution 3 were narrated and prescribed by the state-wide system and were considered to be a politically sensitive topic on campus as a result. One participant noted:

So when [state system] came up with the general education statements, and the assessment of the [statements], because it was directed from a central point, it wasn't met well, at least at our campus-level. And so far we have not had that come to us from more of a student life orientation. So we believe, here, that the best way to build capacity is really to establish good personal relationships within the department and act as their consultant...when we want to talk about assessment or even establishing a learning outcome we don't even use those words (IR/EA).

A participant used an analogy that academic and student affairs often appear as though they are steering two very different ships, going in somewhat different patterns, but they make a concentrated effort to overlap and connect in common priorities whenever possible. "So we would then, student affairs, believe that we directly have impact on some of the general education outcomes, yet the assessment of that is not centrally coordinated" (DSAA) and many efforts remain in active development stages. This sentiment was reflected by other participants and there was a general hesitancy to discuss student affairs as having direct contributions to general education but openness to discussing roles in student learning. It was clearly noted that faculty feel they have the

ownership over general education. A participant commented “I do want to stress student affairs in a supporting role” (IR/EA) in educational efforts and added that general education responsibilities are “more owned by the faculty” (IR/EA). ...we don’t usually get accepted for having it [general education contributions] through a course. Just to keep that in mind, it is more owned by the faculty” (IR/EA). Yet, when discussing specific examples, connections, partnerships, and alignment in priorities and educational efforts became apparent (and will be discussed in specific detail in subsequent sections of findings). Hesitancy existed in explicitly stating so and in drawing the connections in a transparent manner.

A participant from the academic assessment unit discussed:

I think it’s [student affairs connection to general education] important, but I think it’s extremely controversial. So, faculty might ask ‘why are those folks having anything to do with stuff that is organic to us. Getting past that is going to take a substantial amount of effort. I think it’s important; I’m on board. But I will say, at the same time, I share some concerns, on the part of the faculty that this may be an add-on that will make it even more difficult to deliver a good general education. Still, I think, again I haven’t seen the learning goals for student affairs; I’ve had a few conversations about this. But, I still think that there needs to be...in academic affairs we phrase learning goals and general education in certain ways. And they’re very focused by subject area. Student affairs goals tend to be a little more vague, and it’s hard to see that they would mesh well. Maybe we need to reconsider how we phrase our learning goals for general education. Or maybe, on the other hand, student affairs needs to rephrase them (IR/EA).

The student affairs division is in a continued state of development in the area of aligning learning toward general education. One participant commented on roles in learning priorities:

I would say that we’re somewhat subversive in how we approach it, as far as how we build capacity. But what we are is we are a central unit within the division of student affairs where we act as consultants and trainers and research analysts and support for any assessment effort within the division of student affairs, and that

does include helping people understand the need to kind of identify what they want people to get from something, which we would call a learning outcome or a program outcome, and then how do they know when they see it (DSAA).

Another participant shared “I don’t even know if I want to formalize it [student affairs student learning contributions], for fear that there is a lot of good things going on; by formalizing it that it might go away” (DSAU). Examples of exceptional educational work were evident throughout the conversation, but explicit connections were not deemed as politically wise.

An avenue for alignment that has seemed to be promising has been in the area of assessment. Institution 3 has a unit for academic assessment functioning distinctly but falling under a traditional office of institutional research, and a unit for student affairs assessment. Participants discussed mutually beneficial relationships between these units in their efforts to capture student learning information in a broad based manner. Additional details will be provided in Finding 4 which discusses achieving a role in the accreditation cycle.

Literature Support

Ample literature examples exist in support of institutional alignment toward building productive practices and assessment efforts connecting curricular and co-curricular programs. In *Assessing General Education Programs*, Allen (2006) asserts that alignment of the campus-wide community is critical in establishing “a cohesive learning environment that supports general education” (p. 91) as well as designing assessment of general education programs. The author speaks specifically to learning

that happens outside the classroom and states that the institution “as a whole, should support the general education program” (p. 103). Offered are numerous examples of initiatives toward building “learning-centered campuses” (p. 115) that lead faculty and staff alike to “accept a shared, mutually respectful responsibility” (p. 115) for helping students meet institutional general education standards. “Alignment is a key concept” (p. 91) and co-curricular efforts in support of general education on college campuses are not presented as a novel idea but rather as highly valuable ways to “provide enrichment activities that support general education outcomes” (p. 114).

In *Making Change Happen in Student Affairs: Challenges and Strategies for Professionals*, Barr, McClellan, and Sandeen (2014) speak to student affairs professionals fulfilling their roles and obligations as educators, discussing that faculty have developed institutional learning outcomes and that instead of student affairs divisions going their own path they “recommend that student affairs professionals give serious thought to simply adopting the institutional learning outcomes as their own” (p. 147). They note that through a direct connection of student affairs work to institutional learning outcomes along with clear assessment demonstrating contributions, student affairs professionals “can develop and sustain strong partnerships with leaders in the faculty and academic administration” (p. 148).

In her chapter discussion of Integrity, or “Doing the Right Thing” (p. 51) in *Five Dimensions of Quality: A Common Sense Guide to Accreditation and Accountability*, Suskie (2015) describes quality as “not a matter of doing things excellently, but doing the right things excellently” (p. 52). In her discussion of the importance of clearly stating

goals or “destinations” (p. 111), she strongly suggests (in two chapters in fact) that we “describe outcomes, not the process to achieve them” (p. 111) in our narratives and that we do all we can to “avoid ‘fuzzy’ terms” (p. 112); instead, we should “use observable action verbs” (p. 112). Suskie’s publication is specifically focused on university wide accreditation, but the lessons for student affairs are apparent within. It is essential that divisions of student affairs learn to demonstrate how their energies and resources contribute in the language of outcomes and in the language of institutional priorities in order to sustain a role in the educational enterprise.

In a monograph *Student Learning as Student Affairs Work: Responding to Our Imperative* (Whitt, 1999), both strong critique and strong encouragement are offered to student affairs professionals. The collection of authors strongly assert the need for student affairs to make a direct shift to focus on student learning. It is also asserted in this monograph that as colleges are shifting from a teaching paradigm to a student learning paradigm, that “everyone who works with students has the responsibility and the obligation to foster learning, and so to be involved in the core purpose of the enterprise” (Andreas & Schuh, 1999, p. 7). In the publication *Coordinating Student Affairs Divisional Assessment*, the authors posit that “historically, the idea that student affairs services should explicitly champion the academic mission of the institution has been somewhat controversial” (Bentrim, Henning, & Yousey-Elsener, 2015, p. xvi) but discuss movements over the past several years that bring the curricular and co-curricular in alignment as a “single lens through which to view the education of students” (Bentrim et al., 2015, p. xvii).

Deciding to simply stake a claim in general education and begin focusing on making tangible student learning oriented contributions is much more complicated. Blimling (2013) shares a story in the New Directions for Student Services *Selected Contemporary Assessment Issues* publication discussing a well-intentioned effort to “demonstrate how participation on certain kinds of student activities helped or perhaps hindered student learning” (p. 12). The initiative was ultimately challenged from the basis that student affairs had “no business in assessing student learning” and that “faculty was in charge of student learning” as well as such assessment was “an attempt by administration to evaluate faculty teaching performance” (p. 12). The issues were attributed to a failure to achieve sufficient buy-in with faculty and thus years of otherwise useful data on student learning went unutilized in any systematic way. Roberts (2015) reminds readers that “student affairs assessment professionals do not operate in a vacuum” (p. 133) and that many political considerations are present in the assessment of student learning and engaging more directly with institutional learning goals. General political power domains (positional, expert, referent, and informational power) are discussed, but referent and informational power are identified as a particularly salient way for student affairs professionals to engage in the shared student learning examination (Roberts, 2015, p. 143). Student affairs professionals are encouraged to maximize referent political power through relationship building with members of the academic arena and information power to use assessment to demonstrate the potential of the outside of classroom learning area.

From a different but related perspective, Wehlburg (2008) reminds readers that “assessment is not an end product but the means to an end: enhanced student learning” (p. 99) and that “the whole point of higher education is to educate the student” (p. 100). Furthermore, examinations of whether or not institutions are meeting obligations are done so from the lens of institutional effectiveness which is examined from three categories: “data collection, data analysis, and the use of that resulting information to lead to improvement” (p. 101). Should student affairs professionals wish to be considered of impact in achieving the purpose of higher education, then fully engaging in shifting practices and success measures to the frameworks by which institutional effectiveness is measured may be prudent.

Another way for student affairs divisions to approach the discussion of how and where they further institutional general learning goals and where they have distinctive student learning and development domains is to engage in what Bresciani (2012) describes as a “reverse hypotheses approach” (p. 9). He proposes beginning the process of clearly articulating roles with the question “what would *not* be done or realized in higher education settings without the skills and contributions uniquely provided by student affairs professionals?” (p. 9). He also suggests a further exploration of the other sectors of the university such as academic affairs, business affairs, and so forth to identify and articulate areas and domains that are only addressed by student affairs. The student affairs profession operates from unique philosophical platforms and operates in unique points of intersections with students and as Bresciani (2012) notes, “the profession needs to better articulate the unique roles and expertise it provides” (p. 9). In the same

publication, under the chapter *The Future of Student Learning in Student Affairs*, Collins (2012) reminds that “staff in student affairs must create student learning outcomes that are connected to the mission of the institution at which they are employed” (p. 191) and that “providing evidence of student learning in the cocurriculum must become part of our everyday processes” (p. 192). Collins (2012) does spend some time strongly critiquing the multiple, varied and non-complementary nature of campus technology, databases in particular, used to track student admission profiles, involvement, campus roles, student learning assessment, and academic success. This discussion will continue in the Technology finding section, but Collins’ technology critique is from the framework that the technology-disconnect problem adds extra silos and that a shared and unified system approach “would bring the campus together – one campus, one system, focused on student learning” (p. 195).

Finding 2: Determining Educational Capacity

Overall Educational Aims

As discussed in the previous section, student affairs divisions electing to make the decision to align their own education priorities with the expressed educational aims of the institution was found to be a key factor of the model institutions’ success in contributing to assessable student learning, and in many cases, the accreditation process. A closely related, but unique finding lies in determining the specific areas of institutional learning aims for which student affairs can make contributions. One of the project goals is to

identify existing and potential measurable contributions to the University of Delaware General Education Goals, now stated as General Education Objectives. The three student affairs divisions in this study focused on espoused institutional education priorities, contributed to student learning, and assessed their progress in numerous and varied ways.

Through a review of each institution's general education statements in conjunction with an examination of each student affairs division and affiliated unit mission, goals, outcomes, and assessment plan documents and reports, eight categories emerged (Table 4.2). The categories are intended to demonstrate the particular general education areas in which the model student affairs divisions are attempting to make direct and indirect efforts to contribute to student learning in an aligned manner.

Table 4.2: General Education Domains Considered for Student Affairs Contributions

<p>Communication</p> <p>Oral communication (presentations, debate, communication in disagreement and in divergent points of view); written communication (coordinating well informed proposals; communication for change, reflective writing, representing experiences in e-portfolio, articulating professional goals, and resume proficiency); general communication effectiveness (express ideas effectively; effective communication in different settings and using different/appropriate formats; communicating and proposing solutions to problems effectively, utilization of sources of information, expressing and interpreting information); and intercultural communication (dialogue on difference).</p>
<p>Critical Thinking</p> <p>Problem solving; evaluation of information and informed application; remaining open minded; adjusting actions based on information; analyzing other people's ideas and proposed solutions; synthesis – multiple ways to approach an issue; creativity – thinking of new approaches to improve things; discussing complex issues and formulating ideas/solutions.</p>
<p>Active Citizenship and Responsibility</p>

Areas such as civic engagement; community service; service learning; community responsibility (reciprocal relationship); effective/successful engagement in a community; exploration of values and ethics; sound decision making – informed decisions; respectful and responsible conduct; facing complex ethical dilemmas; and ethical leadership are frequently listed.
Health and Wellness Making healthy lifestyle choices, fitness, and/or activity in a student learning outcome manner affording them the opportunity to connect their findings to broad general education statements.
Cultural Diversity Understanding and respect for cultures and ethnic groups different from their own; engagement with diversity; world cultures; appreciation of difference; understanding society; understanding culture; identify own cultural traditions; dealing with conflict due to personal differences; working with people from different ethnic, racial, and religious backgrounds; effective intercultural communication; meaningful interactions and learning; openness to challenge of one's view; identity and self-awareness.
Global Perspective Exploration of current global issues; global awareness; further the goals of society; exploration of connections of local and global communities/issues; operating with civility in a complex world; environmental sustainability.
Value/application of learning Attitude of inquiry; life-long learning; connections of in class and out of class learning experiences; application of learning into practice; and intellectual curiosity; the ability of students to use information and concepts from studies in multiple disciplines in their intellectual, professional, and community lives.

The general education domains listed in Table 4.2 are not considered novel and may appear in many institutions beyond the models selected for this study. It should also be stated that there exist many areas of general education or common education goals, quantitative reasoning for instance, to which student affairs does not make documented contributions and that fall within domains requiring a classroom approach. However, the results display a set of common education areas in which student affairs divisions at the

model institutions have indicated that they possess the educational capacity to make direct or indirect (though none claim exclusive) contributions.

Student learning areas highlighted many of the themes found through the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) and in particular the publication *High-Impact Educational Practices: What They Are, Who Has Access to Them, and Why They Matter*, by Kuh (AAC&U, 2008). NSSE High Impact Practices were referenced frequently in interviews from each of the three institutions in this study. Much of the NSSE literature focuses on capturing observations of the full college experience without looking at the in class and out of class experiences as separate and unrelated. It appears that focusing practices and success measures from a NSSE perspective helped the student affairs divisions begin to bridge goals and strategies to more broadly encompass broader institutional education aims. In particular, interview participants cited a focus on the following High Impact Practices:

- First-Year Seminars and Experiences
- Learning Communities
- Diversity/Global Learning
- Service Learning, Community-Based Learning

It the AAC&U publication *Assessing Underserved Students' Engagement in High Impact Practices* (2013) the authors note that “The most powerful recommendation Kuh made in 2008 followed from a single conclusion: high-impact practices have a pronounced effect on the experiences of underserved students” (p. vi). Many of the NSSE publications highlight positive associations between high-impact and other engagement

indicators with measures of student learning, higher grade points, and student retention for student in general. Though in many reports, NSSE indicators of engagement have a higher positive impact for African American students, Latino students, and students with lower ACT scores (Kuh, 2008).

Examples of student affairs efforts to focus on, contribute to, and assess general education priorities are displayed for each of the three model institutions as follows.

Institution 1

The context for Institution 1 is unique in that student affairs units articulated learning outcomes well before general education goals were established in the academic curriculum. “Years ago, we set up broad categories that we felt like all students who engaged with us should have some learning in those areas” (VPSA) and the student affairs division worked with individual departments to put them into practices. Student affairs division helped lead the institution-wide effort in developing general education goals for undergraduates, considering all parts of campus. As a result, a genuine alignment emerged and the student affairs division goals “mirror a lot of the learning goals for undergraduates” (DSAA). “We have been looking at things like social responsibility, communication, lifelong learning, and critical thinking for a while, and trying to figure out how do you assess those things in a co-curricular context” (VPSA). Although Institution 1 is a large public university, the initial lead by student affairs into general education domains and examining outcomes while likely quite unusual, does allow the division to clearly express a role in overall student learning.

The analysis of Institution 1 general education statements and accreditation reports alongside student affairs division and unit-level mission, goals, and assessment reports demonstrates an approach that places value on the full student learning experience. Some goals/outcomes appear in the exact same format in student affairs and general education statements and direct connections are being made. A study participant noted:

And for us, we always have to figure out how to translate the academic language into student affairs language, and vice versa. But, I think we do a pretty good job breaching the gap between faculty and student affairs, part of it because of our structure, and being on faculty senate committees which puts us in contact with faculty. And part of it is because there is a history of that; there is a tradition of that here (DSAA).

A study participant from Institution 1 shared a sentiment that “the majority of them seem to intersect or connect” (DSAA) when asked of the linkages between student affairs and general education goals. In fact, participants also referenced an investment in the full set of general education statements, through indirect or small connections. One participant discussed that while student affairs units are better equipped to address some outcomes more than others, he noted that the division “probably [does] not [directly contribute to] mathematics and such” (VPSA) for most students, but readily added an example of treasurers of student organizations who are taught how to operate within a larger budget system and manage accounting records. “Whether it is mathematics or quantitative literacy or another goal, there are ways we can relate to these, even if they don’t look exactly like student affairs” (VPSA).

Participants from Institution 1 discussed a number of ways in which they see student affairs contributing to general education in assessable ways. One participant noted:

I think it's happened in a whole lot of different ways. I think that there are various kinds of curriculums that occur in the residence halls that are very different from what occurs in our rec sports department that may be different than what happens in our disabilities office. I think a core or common thing would be leadership, another common thing would be teamwork and another would be communication, public speaking. So I think there are some things that cross, problem-solving. That's one of the things we work on with students; okay, we've taught you how to be a good event manager, but now something goes awry, and so what do you do, how do you solve that problem? So we work with them about problem solving and thinking on their feet, and then we work with them also on how you take those skills and talk about them with potential employers and so forth. I think those are the kinds of things that would run across units (VPSA).

Student affairs professional staff have many connection points with students outside the classroom and have the potential to engage in many opportunities for educationally purposeful activities and reflection. Institution 1 participants shared a sentiment that all the various units encounter students in different contexts, but all share a commitment to a common set of learning priorities and are able to apply their unique contexts toward common institutional aims.

One of the things that we actually wrote into our learning outcomes, general education, is experiential learning. And, the way that we've written that in there, talks about it in terms of student engagement and out of class experience, so maybe study abroad, it can be being involved with undergraduate research, it can also mean being involved with community service, leadership activities, other things. So we really broadened our conception of the areas in which we would want students to grow (VPSA).

This student affairs division also created a center focused on civic engagement and community service and offers leadership certificate bearing institutes with "very clear learning outcomes, and we have a wonderful assessment project for assessing the

learning of students” (DSAA) in that program. In addition, Institution 1 has developed numerous residential living-learning communities (LLCs) and one participant noted that perhaps the LLC that has the strongest learning outcomes is found in their entrepreneurship program. “Beyond e-portfolio, we have a pretty robust online assessment process where students can input their experiences and their learning so over time they can contrast what their learning outcomes are of their engagement with entrepreneurs” (DSAA).

Institution 1 portrays a commitment to assessing and improving student learning opportunities and a participant shared:

For example, [number omitted] years ago, the group decided at our retreat that we really wanted to begin to do some assessment around the diversity efforts in the division. And we thought it was a good idea, we thought that should be a good project for us. And then people said, ‘wait a minute, I don’t know if I know enough to do that.’ So, we decided that we would take a year and study diversity education. So we did. We brought in speakers, both on campus speakers as well as off campus, and we educated ourselves. And it cumulated into a one week 30 hour intensive, difference power and discrimination seminar. It was really wonderful. So we had these common learning experiences. And then after that year, we said, ‘okay, let’s figure out what to do with this learning that we have.’ So we spent another year developing this rubric that we now have out in departments for them to use in thinking about how we develop our diversity curriculum, both within departments and across departments... But, you know, some people say ‘well that’s not the role of [student affairs assessment team].’ Well, maybe, maybe not, but we decided to take it. And so that’s what we did. It’s a self-directed, how can we contribute, how can we assist, in the important things for our division, and tie it into assessment (DSAA).

While specific programmatic examples were not explored and those specifics would be outside the scope of this study, diversity was an educational platform that was referenced throughout document analysis for Institution 1. Given that the diversity approaches were

built with assessment and broader institutional learning aims in mind, specific indicators of success were identified and specified in measurable/assessable terms.

Participants from Institution 1 also shared thoughts about some of the approaches utilized to explore ways that the multiple and varied units within the student affairs division contribute to student learning and the assessment of student learning. One participant notes:

Well one of the things we decided when we did those [general education outcomes] was not all of those are for across the board for student affairs, but some units will contribute to those in very specific ways. But, our goal is that if students interact with student affairs across the lifespan of their experience, they will receive opportunities for development in those areas through the range of interaction, not that one unit will necessarily achieve all outcomes (DSAA).

Critical thinking was cited as a specific example and described as requiring a variety of direct and indirect contributions and assessment by many units within the division. A participant commented:

We don't ask that all units look at all learning outcomes on an annual basis because we would prefer to have really in depth assessment plans, rather than surface plans. And again part of it is that since we are in it for the long haul, we really want to teach people how do you construct a plan that's really focused and clear over a long period of time (VPSA).

Individual units within the division of student affairs assert and decide what they will choose to focus on and report on from their assessment efforts for a specific learning outcome, but each of the units is expected to contribute to the student learning goals shared by the division and the institution.

Institution 2

Institution 2 operates from a different context. While the student affairs division in Institution 1 has worked from a student learning/general education framework for over 25 years and whose work in this area preceded the articulation of university general education goals, Institution 2 elected to fully adopt university general education statements verbatim as the guideline for the student affairs division and affiliated units and discussed a “need to speak the language of the academic side of the house in a more unified way to discuss where and how students are learning” (DSAA). Participants discussed that the primary goal is toward improving student affairs in student learning and that the division focuses on cognitive (knowledge; thinking); affective (attitudes); and psychomotor (actual skills; doing) when developing learning strategies and assessing student learning (DSAA; DSAU).

Let's say the outcome is critical thinking. How do we want students to be impacted? We want them to be able to think critically - about a process, about an issue, about a concept, whatever it may be, critical thinking is the outcome. What do we want students to learn about this thing called critical thinking? Is it how to think critically, how to process information, how to extrapolate information? Whatever it is, that we want them to learn? Then we ask, where is it happening? Critical thinking can happen on a job, in the campus center, it can happen in a program in the residence hall... so you align your programs and services to the learning constructs or the learning outcomes that you want people to be able to obtain. That's the next step. Then you figure out - how am I going to assess whether or not I've impacted learning? Whether it's a pre-assessment, a post-assessment, an experiential kind of observation, whatever it is, how am I going to assess it and then how am I going to report it out? The steps are that simple (VPSA).

With a full adoption of the university general education statements, the division has mapped all student affairs initiatives to general education goals and documents primary/direct and secondary/indirect contributions to learning as a result of division

efforts. Each unit within the division utilized a common process to map connections and contributions and participants noted that in some cases, individual units had to go through several iterations to develop practices with these student learning goal domains in mind. A participant offered an example of the counseling center to demonstrate the transition to mapping practices to general education outcomes.

The Counseling Center [are] data collection experts already. They are already doing it. Counseling is very much data driven. It was pretty easy for them, honestly, to map some of the points on their assessment tools that they use, pretty easy to map that to [general education goals]. Knowing fully well that no one gets an award for mapping something to every [goal]. You know, there is no competition. We don't have to show that everything we do meets all [goals]... That group is so comfortable using data for improvement that it was pretty easy (DSAA).

It was discussed in an interview that in addition to connecting to learning, participation in assessment efforts and connecting data has had other important benefits, such as connections to retention and graduation. Specific to the Counseling Center:

We know that students that [engage with professionals in the Counseling Center] tend to be more diverse in terms of race and ethnicity than the total race and ethnicity demographics for the campus. That's pretty stellar, knowing in a lot of the research that's out there, members of underrepresented minorities tend not to ask for help, especially at a predominately white university. So, having different demographics that are more racially and ethnically diverse in our Counseling Center has been very good to know. And in addition, students that go to counseling at some point in their time here tend to be retained at a higher percentage rate and graduate at a higher percentage rate than their peers that do not. So that's been pretty cool. And those kinds of numbers have gotten us more money to hire more counselors, those kinds of things. That's been very good (DSAA).

Mapping to general education outcomes and developing assessment beyond unit-specific aims toward broader institutional goals was also noted as a contributing factor in a more

direct investment in university student retention. Participants discussed that developing and disseminating knowledge about what indicators make a difference in student retention has been very helpful toward improving practices.

The student conduct office was offered as another example by Institution 2 participants as a student affairs unit that shifted practices and furthered educational capacity through mapping outcomes to general education. It was noted that the conduct office is highly focused on education traditionally, but was able to direct and connect educational efforts to specific general education goals. The division took each general education goal and graphed level of contribution, number of initiatives, types of initiatives - both direct and indirect and “evaluated if that was where we wanted to be” (DSAA) or if different or additional approaches were needed. Through this process, the division of student affairs identified clearly where the learning was occurring, existing pedagogy or strategy, and where improvements were necessary. In addition, the mapping approach was described as helpful for “work across multiple units” (DSAU).

In order to more effectively generate student learning assessment findings, the student affairs division at Institution 2 developed a bank of assessment questions using academic assessment as a guide for assessment of general education goals and adapted those questions while maintaining direct alignment. A participant described this assessment approach as a “great connection to academic areas” (DSAA). The common bank of questions has allowed the student affairs division to assess student learning across programs and allows for what a participant described as “integration of data”

across departments and units, both academic and student affairs, and to “connect to accreditation” (DSAA). A participant offered the example of core communication skills and noted that they were derived from course evaluations but then “we heavily adapt them to fit our needs but still maintain common purpose. This really helps later down the road to connect the contributions of both the class areas and out of class areas to these goals” (DSAA). Additionally:

Contributions to learning are easy to connect at any time – different units contribute at different times. We looked at the questions that were asked, and we knew which part of the bank they had grown out of, we knew which [general education goals] that they were assessing. I was able to say literally here are examples of learning as related to the core communication skills for [educational initiative], here they are for critical thinking, and for understanding society and culture, values and ethics... It was essentially just an easier way to help us organize the report and it is using language that all of the other faculty on campus already know... the faculty members see it and can see how you in a valuable way really support the education of students (DSAA).

The student affairs division from Institution 2 has accepted the responsibility to convey the university general education goals regularly with students and to “help students make the connections” (DSAU). Participants described that at the start of each program or event, student affairs professionals describe to students which general education outcome an event or program is intended to further. It was noted that students, faculty, and staff know the general education outcomes and commonly refer to them and that there are “ongoing opportunities to reflect and discuss at out-of-class programs and connect back to learning in class” (DSAA). A participant shared that strategies are developed to help with closing the loop – “make things obvious...help students make connections” by regular conversations and “assist students with documenting when they

made a connection through portfolio, resume, journal,” etc. (DSAU). A participant also offered:

The more that we can help students make the connection between what they may be doing with us and then how it could impact their classes, that is the key, at least that has been the key for us to help them see what it is that they have learned. There are some neat implications....see the light bulb moments for the students. Where they can see, wow, I can really market these skills to get a job. Of course they can. But why would they think about that unless we are helping them make those connections. And by aligning the different programs that we do with the specific academic areas, we can kind of help them break their learning down into these, well, for us what we have these major [general education] components. And really help them make some of the really important connections. The goal is wherever possible to make educational connections to the [general education] goals (DSAA).

As clarifying questions were presented in the interview, the participant discussed:

We are very upfront about saying – ‘a lot of the content that you will see in this presentation or that you will hear in this seminar or in this experience, we are going to relate to the [general education goal] on understanding society and culture, so please keep that in mind as you go through this discussion’. So, we will start the program with a statement like that. And, then they will restate it again when there is an evaluation form administered for that event, or program or seminar, or whatever it is (DSAA).

An example of a leadership program was discussed:

Where literally at the top of the form it specifically outlines which [general education goals] and asks several questions that are directly related to those, in addition to the typical satisfaction questions. All the information is, of course, used to improve the future programs. We try to be as intentional as we can. Now, we do try to make the language more user friendly. So, instead of saying ‘these are going to improve intellectual depth, breadth, and adaptiveness’, we might say something like ‘this is related to [goal number], which talks about the ability to adapt the things that you are learning to some other deeper concepts.’ So, we put it into a slightly different language than what they read on the actual statements (DSAA).

Student learning assessment related to student affairs division efforts toward general education goals was actively discussed by several participants from Institution 2.

The use of division-developed common questions and assessment templates that can be adapted by individual units were described as a means to help ease some of the challenges of assessment design by the individual units. Participants discussed that qualitative data is mapped to general education goals as well as indicators of “where and how students are articulating in it the connection in their words” (DSAU). Critical thinking (considering new perspectives, analysis, and connection to new situations) was offered as an example by one participant who shared that “students related what they learned in the program to what they learned in class, in their words, and how the application and connection happened, such as ‘shape way of thinking’ or ‘change point of view’” (DSAU). The participant also shared that they have been able to collect a range of reflections from students, for example “vision for their social justice approach and action” and that many different types of assessment (rubric; student journals; online assessment; interviews; pre and post assessment; direct as well as indirect measures) are used depending on the type of learning being explored.

Participants discussed that all assessment is used for improving student learning rather than as a type of direct accountability or means of comparing units. It was noted that programs “grow up with assessment and [general education goals] in mind...shape them to a full picture” (DSAA) and that logic model approaches are used to examine inputs, activities, outputs, and outcomes for planning purposes. Another participant added that “if we see a change in outcomes, we can trace it and know exactly where and how... and identify clearly what the initiatives are intended to do and what changes are expected as a result” (DSAU). A participant described establishing specific criteria and

standards for student affairs units and shared common reflections such as “What is good enough? What levels do we want our students to attain” (DSAU)? An investment in what was described as honest scoring of student affairs support of general education and how low assessment results (ex: area of communication was discussed) led to adding more experiential and advanced components as well as extending initiatives. Assessment is not considered to be an add-on to unit programs and initiatives and is described as a “part of the process from the beginning” (DSAA).

Participants emphasized a focus on High Impact Practices as described by NSSE, namely, Learning Communities, Service Learning, Diversity/Global Learning, and First-Year Experiences. It was noted that within High Impact Practices there exists:

A focus on integrative learning – connections in and out of class; application – connection to real world; and reflection and analysis – understanding the benefits of what they are doing; reflection on site and afterward...structured experiences, repetition, practice, and decisions, not passive information...students discover the relevance of their learning through real world application and examples (DSAU referencing an internal document).

An element of assessment practices in the student affairs division also includes a focus on examining “who participates in High Impact Practices and who does not and who needs it the most or benefits the most” (IR/EA). Specifically, student affairs assessment on High Impact Practices explores the following specific student populations:

- Under-represented students
- Transfer students
- First-generation students
- Veterans
- Nontraditional/adult learners

While NSSE indicators are considered important by Institution 2, a participant shared a view that NSSE provides a “thin baseline...not specific of what learning and what student experience is” (IR/EA) and there is a need to add content and add ongoing measures and guided reflections in order for the High Impact Practices to lead to the type of learning being sought by Institution 2.

Participants from Institution 2 shared numerous examples of programs and initiatives such as a leadership development program which is mapped to many of the general education outcomes, social justice education initiatives, numerous civic engagement with an “interrelated focus on experiential learning, service projects, partnerships with local communities, and global engagement” (DSAA). The student affairs division at Institution 2 also assumes support roles with the First Year Experience Program through campus program and activity support on the topic of the common-reader, and through co-instruction roles.

Institution 3

Institution 3 represents a context unrelated to Institution 1 or 2. Participants demonstrated clearly held beliefs that student affairs staff have the capacity to contribute to student learning but do so in a fairly subtle, quiet way due to political considerations and sensitivities. Almost all initiatives in the area of student learning toward general education are described through the lens of partnerships with academic units over soloist approaches by student affairs units and were described to help offer credibility to the initiatives and clarify hierarchy of roles in the learning process. Participants noted that

student affairs has less of a focus on direct learning outcome assessment (not drawing explicit connections) but “we do a lot of program-impact evaluation” (DSAA).

When contributions to general education by student affairs questions were addressed in the interview process, participants from Institution 3 were able to offer a variety of examples. For instance the general education area of communication was discussed at length.

We have some courses that are developed and run through student affairs. One of them is the freshmen seminar, and it is typically taught by student affairs instructors. That course has a general education designator for oral communication, so students have to practice their oral presentation, and we have about 22 sections of that course, so students have to give 3 to 4 speeches in that course, and it is a small class with only 20 students in it. That particular course is offered to first year students, and we can cover about 400 of the first year students with that particular course. They also focus on other aspects – they try to work with the students on critical thinking skills and study skills. Critical thinking is one of our gen eds, but this course is not designated as a critical thinking course. It is an oral communications course, so they do support the gen ed in that particular course (IR/EA).

It was also noted that:

We also have a course that is co-taught by student affairs and faculty, and that course is designated as a writing course. It counts toward the writing gen ed. That course is organized through student affairs, and one of our deans... in a partnership between the two divisions - student affairs and academic affairs, it is a partnership, and what happens there is a faculty member teaches about a content area that is of particular interest to them and the student affairs individual covers the student affairs part of the course, so things like academic advising, diversity, learning through the campus resources. Together, the faculty member and the student affairs instructor help the student with their writing skills (IR/EA).

Additional contributions in the area of communication were described as contributing to communication skills through such initiatives as sponsoring debate, supporting the debate team, and working with international and ESL students with cultural situated and socially appropriate writing.

The student affairs division at Institution 3 has invested in developing residential living-learning communities and has utilized this structure to facilitate collaborative efforts to improve student learning gains. A participant discussed “faculty and student affairs co-taught courses that are designated for the learning community” (IR/EA). For instance, “one of our faculty masters is a philosophy instructor, and he will often set up and have debates about issues that are concerning ethical issues” (DSAU). It was discussed that the faculty member generally wants the conversations to continue and invites other colleagues to engage with students on issues of ethics from a variety of perspectives and considerations.

In the area of civic engagement participants discussed:

We just got flooded [area name omitted] pretty seriously...and quickly within 7-10 days the faculty and staff put together a 2-credit course for students to take. It has involvement from campus staff, campus faculty, community leaders, and it is integrative with so many disciplines. It is in the evenings, and the entire community is invited to participate and help with the discussions. So, I think it is a fascinating package. When you look at these things, it is a really interesting way for the campus to go. It brings the whole community together (IR/EA). *The course syllabus was provided – sent via e-mail for review.*

Additionally, a global education example was offered:

Another example I want to give you have to do with one of our gen ed requirements – creating a global vision. With that particular one, we have a lot of efforts that student affairs is closely involved with – creating a global vision. One example would be – our career development center put together a program for students that helps them identify opportunities to globalize themselves. Some students may choose to study abroad and use that as a way to help themselves understand global issues more. But, not every student does that. That is just one way to do it. We have a whole list of other ways that we can help students accomplish that. Our career development center has taken on that task because we want all of our students to graduate having had or being immersed in some type of global experience. It may be a study abroad, but it may be some type of partnership that they have right here on campus with an international student or it may be that they study a particular country and applying that. We in student

affairs are always looking for ways to help students with establishing a global vision and understanding. We, our student affairs staff, just actually had a meeting with the dean of students from [country name omitted], the university of [country name omitted], and are taking about ways that we might be able to collaborate – helping their students learn about the things we do here and helping our students learn from their experiences and what they have been doing. So, we have all those types of partnerships with other universities. We create opportunities or just develop opportunities to help students be able to connect with people from other parts of the world and other cultures, so that is just one example of our gen ed (DSAU).

The participant added:

When you look at foreign language, for example, that is one where you would not necessarily think that they [student affairs] would contribute yet they do. I think the whole institution is involved with all. Sometimes its partnerships between student affairs and academic affairs. Like, the foreign language example that we chose, it is happening outside the classroom because we have the Italian table, the French table, etc. so every couple of weeks, students who are interested in speaking those languages can go and participate in these discussions...Another natural fit would be in our learning goals in global interdependencies through diversity aspects of general education...I think we do a pretty good job of getting students to have feelings with students of other races and ethnicities (DSAU).

A participant also addressed general education linkages in the area of critical thinking:

Our critical thinking assessment has led to conversations on campus about what we really need to work on with students, not just memorizing; they need to know how to integrate information, they need to know how to apply information. This broadened the conversation beyond the classroom (IR/EA).

A participant summed up the general education connections with:

I am sure we help with all [general education goals] in some way but some more than others. The examples that I brought to you...definitely are the oral communication, the writing, the global interdependencies, we mentioned foreign language... aesthetics – I am sure in lots of ways we contribute, but it is less formal. The ones I mentioned are formal (DSAU).

She added that “I think that there are a lot of opportunities in [initiatives] having to do with diversity, oral communication, writing, and activity and wellness” (DSAU).

Similar to Institution 2, Institution 3 student affairs division assumed a responsibility for communicating general education goals to undergraduate students and helping them learn what is expected for general education learning gains at the institution. The participant described this charge as unique and unusual. The participant noted:

I was actually first hired at the university to implement this program called [name omitted]. Through [name omitted], we have what we call [name omitted] Advisors, and they work with all the undergraduate students to help them when they first get here as first year students. They work with students to help them understand what the gen ed requirements are. They also help students to choose courses that will meet those gen ed requirements. So, they will sit down with the students and have what we call a [program name omitted]. Through [this program], we invite all the undergrads but we will meet with mostly first-year and sophomore students. Because by the time they have chosen a major they have completed their gen ed requirements and they are being advised through their faculty departments. But prior to that when they are newer students or undecided students that is when our [name omitted] Advisors will help them to understand what the gen eds are and then they will look at their degree allotted reports and show them where they have met their gen eds and where they still have to meet more gen eds. So that is a way we help students understand what they are supposed to do in their area of general education (DSAU).

Also similar to Institution 2, undergraduate retention was adopted as a priority for

Institution 3. The participant explains that:

We instituted an early-warning program for students who we thought might be at risk for attrition...How could we improve?...Are we targeting the right kind of students? While direct learning outcome assessment is not heavily emphasized, “we have been working very hard at the departmental level when they do any type of training and planning that they think it through in the context of ‘what do you want someone to get from what you are doing.’ So, in that way, we do learning outcomes. And, I would say we have made a lot of headway, because people started out thinking that the world would move by half an hour presentation or something. And, we got them to thinking that ‘okay, if you’ve only got a half hour with a student, what do you really expect them to get from that half an hour and how are you going to know it (IR/EA)?

Literature Support

Literature support was readily available reinforcing the direction the three model student affairs divisions have taken in support of general education at their respective institutions.

A great deal of support for directing the energies of student affairs toward institutional general education can be found in *Learning Reconsidered 2* (Keeling, 2006) which was developed with representatives from seven national or international professional associations representing the units that make up student affairs divisions. In this publication, Borrego (2006) discusses:

...because learning has been traditionally defined in separate curricular and co-curricular terms, the challenge to successful mapping for a more holistic student experience is to shift our [student affairs] language to institutional learning outcomes as the basis for our interventions and programs (p. 12).

She goes on to note “every program should have clear and specific learning outcomes and a clear link to the mission of the campus (or its institutional learning outcomes)” (p. 13).

Learning Reconsidered 2 offers a Self-Assessment of a Student Affairs Practitioner worksheet in which the first three self-assessment questions are “How do I contribute to student learning at my institution?” (p. 50), “How do I contribute to integrated learning at my institution?” (p. 50), and “Is integrated learning one of my top daily priorities?” (p. 50). The additional 13 questions of this self-assessment follow similar themes.

In *Making Change Happen in Student Affairs*, Barr et al. (2014) remind readers that “...the role of faculty in controlling the curriculum in colleges and universities is an essential principle of shared governance in higher education, and that principle is

reflected in the founding documents of our [student affairs] profession...” (p. 147). As student affairs divisions seek to demonstrate both competence and capacity to add directly to student learning, professionals in these divisions should not expect a blurring of roles nor should they be seeking faculty-like status. Student affairs does have areas of its own specialty to focus on toward the effect of improving student learning. Barr et al. (2014) offer “this is not to say that student affairs ought to abandon the traditional or contemporary knowledge, skills, and attitudes that it seeks to foster in students” (p. 148). They add “it is our observation that these domains lend themselves to association with the learning outcomes typically expressed in institutional learning outcome statements” (p. 148).

In fact, the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) “a consortium of professional associations in higher education, [that] promotes the use of its professional standards for the development, assessment, and improvement of quality student learning, programs, and services” (p. 6) offers 16 learning and development domains in their publication *Frameworks for Assessing Learning and Development Outcomes* (Strayhorn, 2006, p. 11):

1. Intellectual growth
2. Effective communication
3. Enhanced self-esteem
4. Realistic self-appraisal
5. Clarified values
6. Career choice
7. Leadership development
8. Healthy behavior
9. Meaningful interpersonal relationships
10. Independence
11. Collaboration
12. Social responsibility

13. Satisfying and productive lifestyles
14. Appreciating diversity
15. Spiritual awareness
16. Personal and educational goals

The above learning and development domains presented by CAS could be readily adapted to connect to most general education statements at the institutional level. The emphasis on making direct contributions to student learning and to measures of student learning is discussed as a means to improve the impact of seemingly random intersections between students and student affairs functions.

Maki (2010) discusses in *Assessing for Learning* that “learning-centered institutions also focus on how programs and services outside the formal curriculum contribute to, support, and complement the curriculum, thereby contributing to students’ achievement of an institution’s mission and purposes” (p. 17). She discusses the learning-centered institution broadly and points out some reciprocal benefits of assessing learning inside and outside the formal curriculum and offers an example as “an institution that develops ethical decision making or civic responsibility would wish to explore not only how these dispositions develop in the classroom, but also how they develop or manifest themselves in residence life, athletics, governance, students’ interactions online, and student work on and off campus” (p. 17). In a reminder that students operate in multiple contexts within a university and that there are many opportunities for them to “learn and reflect on their learning and offers educators opportunities to learn about the efficacy of our teaching or educational practices and experiences” (p. 17).

By first connecting the goals and success measures of student affairs to the language of the academy and then identifying and developing educational capacity,

student affairs divisions can also more actively bring faculty and academic administration into topics of traditional importance to the student affairs profession. One such topic is diversity awareness and support, long a central priority for student affairs national associations. As colleges and universities seek to increase access, diversity campuses, increase competencies associated with working with difference, and retain minority students at a higher rate, student affairs literature and scholarship has much to offer. The *Journal of College Student Development* is replete with studies in this area. In addition, in the area of student engagement and its benefits, Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) authors Finley and McNair (2013) discuss the unequal gains between majority and underserved students following engagement in High Impact Practices. In such activities, the underserved student gains are higher.

Finding 3: Establishing a Culture of Assessment

In *Student Affairs Assessment: Theory to Practice*, Henning and Roberts (2016) describe a culture of assessment as “a set of pervasive actions and behaviors by staff across an organization focusing on the use of data in decision making regarding the accountability and improvement of programs and services” (p. 263). Each of the participants from the selected model institutions discussed, in most cases with no prompting, the essential nature of creating a culture of assessment within their organizations and within their institutions. The emphasis placed on this aspect in each of the discussions was striking as was the organic nature of the conversation.

The extensive review of institutional documents such as two accreditation cycles and student affairs assessment reports and use of the Document Review Rubric (see Appendix C) prior to the interview afforded the opportunity for a fruitful conversation. Subjects were particularly generous in this area and provided comprehensive stories about the evolution of their assessment efforts, and many volunteered to send unpublished documents for further analysis and discussion.

The interviews resulted in three major areas of consideration for building a culture of assessment which are displayed in Table 4.3. A clear philosophy about the purpose and role of assessment was considered crucial to the foundation. The development of an organizational infrastructure and resources allowed assessment aspirations to become fully established. And strategies for sustaining and enhancing assessment practices were described as essential for long-term gains. This findings section will discuss the story and evolution of the model institutions in the area of developing a culture of assessment as well as the infrastructure and sustainable approaches that were created. Additionally, each interview participant was asked for words of advice for building and sustaining this assessment culture and their answers to this and other assessment topics offer insights that may be valuable to the University of Delaware should developing such a culture be pursued.

The topic of the professional culture in student affairs and the importance of organizational culture considerations at the division level is introduced with a high degree of frequency in both best-practice and model institution examinations. The following major priority categories have been developed to encompass key findings.

Table 4.3: Indicators of Assessment Culture

Philosophy	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3
Improvement focus tied to institutional learning aspirations	X	X	X
Division-wide investment in learning outcomes	X	X	
Learning organization – value learning	X	X	
Long-range view for improvement	X	X	X
Transparency – value and practice and honest self-appraisal	X	X	
Infrastructure and Anchoring Systems	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3
Resources allocation & budget planning based on data	X	X	X
Personnel – centralized position(s), GA(s), assessment specific position duties	X	X	X
Division-wide committee	X		
Data management plan/system	X	X	X
Sustaining and Improving	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3
Staff development and ongoing training	X	X	
Annual reinforcements – assessment plan, assessment report, recognition, sharing, celebration	X	X	X
Senior leadership – champions; expectations, and long-term involvement	X	X	X

Institution 1

Institution 1 has maintained a strong focus and emphasis on assessment toward improving student learning far longer than the other institutions participating in this study. It was fortunate that the study participants had institutional longevity and were foundational actors in the development of a strong culture of assessment and were able to describe key factors that have made a big difference in the evolution of their program. Efforts were estimated to have begun in earnest around 1995 and started with creating a

“vision for how we could add value to the mission of the university” (VPSA).

Assessment was identified as a specific initiative and funding was dedicated to “support aggressive learning” (VPSA) by sending student affairs professionals to conferences and bringing experts in to facilitate institutional learning. The division sponsored campus-wide assessment showcases “to begin to create space for those who had been doing [assessment] work to showcase what they did no matter how rudimentary” (VPSA). The participant added “we just continued to invest and make this a high priority in terms of providing funding for people to go” (VPSA).

The philosophy of the assessment program was considered to be important at Institution 1. For instance, assessment can be used for things such as self-promotion, external accountability, etc., but the approach described by the interview participants was consistently focused on improvement. One participant noted:

We have from the very beginning, we have said this is about continuous improvement. And so when we look at assessment reports and work that’s being done, it’s always from the framework of, okay, how can we make this better? Either how can it help your assessment process be better, or, jeez you thought you were doing well, here, this doesn’t look as good as you had hoped. How can we help make this program better? And, we’ve been very, very consistent in that messaging and that practice. And I think its given people a sense of more freedom to be able to say this wasn’t working so great but here are the type of things we’re thinking about doing to improve it, versus it always being seen as sort of this negative thing (VPSA).

Another participant described the evolution of assessment practices noting that “you couldn’t even find anything written in student affairs assessment at that time” as starting “where most places start, with you know, with satisfaction, looking at who do we serve, who do we not serve, those kind of things. So it was sort of easy to collect information”

(DSAA). Following some initial years of capturing measures of satisfaction and usage rates, the participant discussed that:

We began shifting to looking at learning. So that's really when we began talking about learning, and trying to think about how do we set these things up, how do we begin to get a handle on that. You know, a lot of people in student affairs have never had a learning theory course. And so, even just beginning to think about, are we teachers, and are students learning? Well yes, students are learning, but are we intentional in what we're teaching? You know, do we think about the learning as we're planning the activities? So it raised a lot of questions for us, and as it raised questions we began trying to figure those out, saying what does it mean to think about a learning orientation versus a teaching orientation (DSAA).

The decision to move from measures of satisfaction to measures of student learning was discussed as foundational in the development of a culture of assessment that leads to providing contributions to institutional education goals.

Participants discussed numerous structural elements that have proven to be important to growing and sustaining a culture of assessment. The first was the movement from a committee of volunteers to dedicating full time staff and resources to a student affairs assessment unit within the division. A participant described "it took us a few years to get there" (VPSA) following recommendations made by the assessment committee and "I sort of made it my mission to find the resources" (VPSA). A one-person unit (director of assessment) was later supplemented with three graduate assistant positions and one additional full-time staff member as roles and duties expanded. The participant expressed that it is important to have both full-time dedicated personnel and a committee from the perspective:

I think an individual trying to push something like this to an organization will sort of, exhaust themselves because of the uneven commitment and the uneven skill that most organizations have relevant to this. But, if you have a group of people who are committed and who support this role and who are part of, in some ways,

being cheerleaders or being advocates for a culture of assessment, and in some ways just being sort of, [models] for what engagement and assessment looks like. I think that's very powerful within an organization and I think that that critical mass of leaders transform organizations more than just a single passionate leader (DSAA).

Another participant noted that members of the assessment committee are “the driving force behind the culture of assessment” and that volunteers are not required to have any experience with assessment, only an interest in learning and “when they decide they want to participate they agree that they will learn and they want to help other people learn...our assessment [committee] is developed as a learning community that we all learn together” (VPSA). Numerous examples of the ways in which the division invests in committee member training and development were offered. Shared leadership is a high value at Institution 1 and the assessment committee is empowered to establish the assessment plan for the division and the senior member of the division then agrees to use the authority of the position to hold both the assessment committee and the units accountable to the plan. The committee puts out annual guidelines and early on established clear agreements that “people will be at different places, and that we need to have a variable standard with that as time goes on we will keep upping that standard for what will be in the plans and how they will look” (VPSA). The structure also provides two committee members who serve as annual reviewers to each unit's assessment plan and participate with the senior student affairs leader in providing feedback and suggestions to the unit. Rationale for the central role and structure of the assessment committee was expressed as:

I think having as much organic in it as you can. I think something that driven by a sole individual, would exhaust and organization and will build in resistance, and

there will sort of be this latent resistance and so I would sort of think about what I need to do to start this process that will start with energy and how do I sustain this energy? And, how do I have that energy be more than just one person's energy. Because again, if you want to think about the culture, how do you build energy within the culture (VPSA).

Taking steps to ensure that multiple or all units within the division maintain student learning assessment as an annual charge was also considered to be an important element by participants. Each unit is asked to select an assessment focus area each year and it is expected to produce an annual assessment report on "how the previous years' results influence practice...or what was done differently as a result of the previous year's information" (DSAA). A participant discussed that the student affairs assessment unit has been expanded to include a key role in division strategic planning and is involved in creating division-wide success metrics to help inform long range planning and demonstrate student affairs contributions to student learning.

Assessment of student learning is also considered when making resource allocations to units within the student affairs division at Institution 1. A participant emphasized that the primary role of assessment was a focus on improvement:

For those units that are not as robust in working on assessment, I think they are at much higher risk of not getting resources when resources come around. Because they've got no data to show, or little data to show; if that makes sense...I'd much rather, when there's a vying for resources, I'd much rather say jeez these things are not working well, but if we had this many thousands of dollars more, we could take this and improve it, and this is how we do it. Then here's the data to substantiate that. I'd much rather be in that place than saying, oh, you know, we need the money, we can't do this stuff. And you say well, prove it, and there's nothing to prove it with, that's kind of a weak place to be (DSAA).

Participants from Institution 1 also described the importance of broadly sharing assessment of student learning results both throughout and outside of the student affairs

division. Senior members of the division publish results via annual newsletters distributed throughout the campus and making results accessible on the division web-site. These leaders also annually present key elements of the student affairs unit-level assessment plans and reports to faculty and staff groups and other institutional organizations.

Finally, long-term support from division and other institutional leaders, in this case members of the provost office, was expressed as crucial to developing and sustaining a student affairs culture of student learning assessment. A participant concluded an interview by noting that:

[senior leadership] person really has to, I think, be seen as a support to it [culture of assessment]; that, there really does have to be a commitment of resources to it. And, there has to be a tolerance for ambiguity and for slow growth. And so, you know, the constant growth over time is a process, in that if people want to sort of judge it based upon whether the plans have immediate contributions, or whether the first one sort of has high-level sophistication. If you have this impatience for it, then the culture won't develop. So when you go into it, my suggestion is that you're in it for the long haul (VPSA).

Institution 2

Similar to Institution 1, it was emphasized by numerous participants from Institution 2 that the foundational role of student affairs assessment is to improve student learning and that a learning outcome approach to develop success indicators is infused throughout the entire division. One participant offered “first and foremost, we use it [assessment] for program improvement. So that if we see if there are some fairly easy changes to be made, especially if we're surprised, if we thought that students would be learning more” (DSAA). This participant described how oftentimes assessment of student

learning can challenge assumptions and lead to modifications in approaches that would not occur without such analysis. However, Institution 2 stands out particularly for a deep commitment to assessment transparency in their philosophical frameworks and an infrastructure that is well formed and anchors assessment into day-to-day practices.

Numerous participants expressed a commonly held value in sharing assessment findings and approaches and ensuring that findings are linked to organizational planning and decision making. Also commonly discussed by Institution 2 participants was an investment in making sure that assessment findings are used rather than simply gathered. This was often referenced in concert with a dedication to ensuring that students' voices are heard and that their contributions to assessment efforts were honored. A participant shared "assessment is about telling your story and your story has to be tailored to your audience – tell your story well; don't just assess or run data" (DSAU). Another participant, a recent arrival to Institution 2 noted "even, just being here for a few months, I think this is a campus that values transparency across the board. Anybody can get on the internet and find out who thinks what. I think the campus itself values transparency" (DSAU).

Structurally, Institution 2 also evolved assessment practices by the student affairs division from a volunteer committee structure to establishing a director for student affairs assessment in 2003. According to one participant, the director for assessment within student affairs "ties all areas together...and makes the story relevant and connected to the broader institutional priorities" (DSAA). He added that "no unit can keep up with all other...[we] need common thread to look out for connections within [student affairs] and

broadly at institution” (DSAA). It was described that as Institution 2 became more data driven and began incorporating broader levels of assessment in strategic planning and budgeting, key support was needed:

I have a feeling that my former boss [name omitted] got to the point where she said ‘I need someone else to be handling...ensuring that we’ve got some sort of system for collecting data across our departments’...so it is part of our culture here (DSAA).

The participant described the evolution and growth of assessment over three strategic plan cycles from “very unorganized” to effective use of learning outcomes in the most recent strategic plan. The strategic plan was sent as an example for further analysis by the participant.

Student learning outcome data was also referenced as a factor in the budget allocation process for the student affairs division. It was noted that “outcomes drive direction and initiatives” (DSAA). Retention studies were cited as examples in this area that connect departments and priorities.

High level support and long-term attention by division and institutional leaders was a frequently cited key element in sustaining the assessment culture at Institution 2. People at the Vice Chancellor and Vice President levels were described as being very aware of the assessment work by student affairs and even through position changes and new leadership, the support for the assessment work has been consistently maintained. One participant commented “I think that if we didn’t have the support all the way up to that level we just wouldn’t be able to get this kind of work done (DSAA). A senior leader with 20-year role on campus was referenced throughout the study as a major driver in the continued evolution of student learning assessment. The director of the student affairs

assessment unit discussed that the organizational structure includes a dotted-line reporting relationship to a Vice Chancellor level and it was that person's perspective that this signaled a higher degree of importance of assessment to the student affairs units. The participant noted:

They know I work in the office with the Vice Chancellor; I have this kind-of dotted-line reporting relationship to [name omitted]. I definitely have seen a change from 'Oh yeah I have to report things to that [name omitted] guy' to giving me a much quicker response when I need information from folks. So I think the culture's been growing in student affairs, and it's led by our Vice Chancellor (DSAA).

He added, "with the culture of assessment, it does drive the common notion of the understanding that there is a common set of learning outcomes that we want our students to have when they graduate" (DSAA).

Ongoing training and staff development was also noted by participants from Institution 2 as an important means to sustaining a strong culture of student learning assessment. As noted previously in the findings, Institution 2 student affairs fully adopted general education statements as the priority for the division. A general sentiment expressed was that people wanted to assess student learning and were on board, and that trainings and annual institutes helped prepare both new and longer term staff to make contributions in this area.

Institution 3

Institution 3 student affairs, as noted in an earlier finding, takes a more subtle approach in assuming a role in broad student learning. Learning outcomes are not

centralized and are articulated at the department or program level. This sentiment carries over into the efforts to engage in student learning assessment and the reporting of results. Strategic plans are described as “very political in nature” (IR/EA) and a great deal of care seems to be taken to make assessment a useful resource to support rather than challenge plans, programs, and initiatives. A participant shared the following story:

I usually wag this editorial out of the Chronical that I think, in 2007, called the *Pedagogical Straightjacket*, in which the author said she was in favor of assessment until an assessment office came and rejected their assessment plans they worked so hard on. Now she’s speaking as a national enemy of assessment. And, what I usually say to my folks on campus is ‘we can’t treat people like this.’ We really have to be evolutionary in our approach, and recognize that assessment takes a good amount of time, to help make it happen. And somebody thinks that assessment is something that is going to happen by mandate overnight, or even for that matter within two years... at least on my campus, it took many, many years, and even today there are still enemies of assessment. So our approach has very much been very evolutionary with this representative from this office saying to people ‘I’m not going to impose anything on you.’ Although sometimes we have to suspend our disbelief; we go out there and the culture has been, we go there and meet them in their offices, they don’t come to ours, and the first thing we say to them is ‘how can we help you?’ not ‘this is what you have to do.’ And that has worked. I won’t say, however, it’s been at all perfect. And so the only way that we found that we’d have success with several departments has been to take the workload thing off the table and say ‘we’re your clerical staff. We’ll do a lot of it for you, what we won’t do is make conclusions about what students are learning.’ And second, we promise you that we’re not going to take this information and punish you with this, and then just working with them. And frankly, sometimes standing in front of the group of people getting yelled at, you know, and just taking it for a while, until finally, they say ‘we give up’(IR/EA).

Participants noted a degree of suspicion about assessment in their environment and took a great deal of care to present assessment as a source of help and support. Participants also described a multi-year approach to implementing assessment strategies which may also factor into helping units become acclimated to utilizing student learning assessment approaches. A participant noted:

It did not happen overnight. I just want to be clear. And it is still a process. It took a solid two years for the transition but I would probably say 3-5 years for it to be fully embraced. But, it was a president saying this is how we are going to do it and then having vice presidents who were strongly committed to implementing that vision (IR/EA).

A general sense of transparency and commitment to sharing data was present at Institution 3 though not as fully promoted, broadcast, or as easily discoverable as was the case with the other two participating institutions. The division prepares and shares an annual report on student involvement and is working to reach campus constituents with results. Additionally, a participant described an institutional norm as follows:

Each division has to have, the campus calls them goals, but we would call them more initiatives that have to be completed within a certain year. And those initiatives have to have measures and the measures are checked every three months and are reported on, and that's reported back up to the president and so forth. So, each department that has those initiatives knows that they have to be involved in a very, more prescribed kind of assessment in reporting is part of having that initiative. And also, annually when each department does annual reports there is a whole section on assessment and measures that they have to report on. And we also have our own divisional dashboard in which those measures are reported (IR/EA).

As with the other participating institutions, establishing a dedicated office for assessment in student affairs was considered necessary. The student affairs division hired a full-time staff member for assessment shortly after the provost hired a staff member to support assessment for academic programs. A participant noted:

I think when people have done that, then those two individuals can be in the most important areas on campus and talk about assessment and how one does it and why it's important for career development, or international students, or even the dean of student life as well as all those faculty departments, as well as involvement management...But, in so many other areas we might have been counting and not assessing; we weren't really even counting the right things. And the focus of these vice presidents putting up individuals in charge has really changed things. Then our vice president for administration embraced the idea of

dashboards so heavily, and our president wanted that as part of our strategic plan that he brought that culture into his area as well (DSAA).

The assessment office is now staffed by 2.5 full time professionals and graduate research assistants. The student affairs assessment office was described as closely affiliated with the university assessment office and the institutional research for a coordinated approach and that the student affairs unit can “provide context to other parts of campus” and the relationship “builds capacity and connections” (DSAA).

As with other institutions, the reporting structure of the student affairs assessment unit was considered to be an important factor in encouraging broad participation in student learning assessment. A participant discussed:

So the fact that we report to the Vice President is significant. And also, that we meet as a division once a semester and at every one of those meetings it is expressed publicly our Vice President’s reliance on data for decision-making. And, that people will not get resources that they request unless they can support their request with some data. And they get that from working with us. So I would say that it’s expressed by the fact that we’re here, by the public pronouncement brought in by the limitation of resources, if you don’t do assessment (DSAA).

The support from the Provost was also discussed. The past Provost was described as highly supportive, while the current Provost was described as “tolerant”. The participant added “so we’ll see. Because leadership is everything, it seems” (IR/EA). The current student affairs Vice President is described as data-driven and “wants assessment to happen in a lot of corners of student affairs” (DSAA). This Vice President is also credited with changing annual reporting from narrative style to a data style approach and “he instituted the dashboard for every area needs to have dashboards which indicate

changes that have occurred; we usually compare the last 5 years, what's happened in your area, measuring all different types of things" (DSAA).

Student learning assessment is also structurally supported by the fact that such assessment influences resource allocation. No examples were offered where this type of assessment led to a reduction in financial allocations, but it was clearly expressed that new resources were generated as a result of assessment findings. It was also expressed that requests for new resources were not likely to be supported in absence of solid assessment data and clear connections to the institutional strategic plan. A participant discussed:

We didn't just stop with the budgeting. We said where are all of our resources? And we have a very similar process for computing, projects, for space, new positions and any other major resource. And, of course, then there is the budgeting that is all integrated, and you have to put in information. Your justification has to be aligned with the strategic plan of the institution or it won't even be considered (IR/EA).

Ongoing professional development to build student learning assessment skills and mindsets was also discussed by participants from Institution 3. A program initiated by the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (NASPA) was adopted and modified for the student affairs division. The program, titled Student Affairs Assessment Leaders is designed to develop key members of the division to lead and support assessment initiatives.

Literature Support

It would be rare to encounter a contemporary text on the topic of student affairs assessment without encountering a major section on the importance of embedding assessment as part of the culture of the unit or division. Whether described by Culp and Dungy (2012) as a “culture of evidence [that] offers student affairs professionals opportunities to examine their work; make it more effective and efficient; and increase the probability that they will design program, processes, and services that really matter” (p. 1) or by Schuh (2013) as a “culture of assessment [in which] staff members recognize that they must collect evidence systematically to demonstrate accountability to their stakeholders, and that they must use that evidence to improve” (p. 89), the topic is ever-present. It is often discussed as much as a habit of mind (Henning 2015) more than as a set of strategies. The idea of taking a cultural approach to development in this arena appears to be paramount.

Roper (2015) describes the student affairs assessment path as neither “flat nor smooth” (p. 1) and discusses observations of “positive amazement” and of “utter confusion” (p. 1) in his many years of experience in this area. Roper (2015) notes that there have been voices and scholarship “describing both the importance of adopting comprehensive assessment practices in student affairs and the value such practice would have for the success, survival, and growth...” but that student affairs has been very slow to respond until recently as “financial, political, institutional, and survival factors converged” (p. 3). Roper (2015) also expresses concern that even after the movement to establish assessment positions in student affairs that they “have been more geared

towards creating a mechanism for gathering assessment data and producing assessment reports than for establishing a lively organizational culture” (p. 7). The establishment of an assessment unit within student affairs is expressed as essential by numerous authors (Henning, 2015; Schuh, 2013), and many discuss the importance of need for cultural shifts throughout a student affairs division and within its units (Henning, 2015; Bingman, Bureau, & Duncan, 2015; Sandeen & Barr, 2006).

Developing an effective assessment oriented habit of mind is discussed in literature on scholar practitioner approaches. Dean (2010) puts forward that “scholar-practitioners integrate the best of both worlds-valuing knowledge, using the research process, shaping interpretations, and applying that knowledge to improve education” (para. 4). She also asserts the need for developing such approaches in student affairs graduate preparatory programs and through annual and regional professional development conferences. Duncan and Holmes (2015) discuss in *Leading Assessment for Student Success* that evidence based decision making is “not just about training professionals how to do a job” (p. 42) and go on to note the importance of creating a community in which members share in the development process and begin to use evidence “for improvement and finding new ways to work to deliver positive student outcomes and overall success” (p. 42). The authors discuss the essential need for strong leadership, both from above and within the organization and that many cultural obstacles and pockets of resistance must be addressed in order to develop an effective, synergistic assessment program.

Livingston and Zerulik (2013) state that “assessment is an essential element of any successful student affairs division” (p. 15). They cite shifts that accreditor expectations and the expectations of university constituents each put forward a need to “create a culture of evidence” and that “assessment is a top priority on college campuses” (p. 15). They discuss the key role played by a dedicated assessment coordinator in a student affairs division, most of which imply that the assessment coordinator plays the role of a divisional leader rather than a functionary. Team creation and leadership, encouragement of assessment projects, maintaining assessment as a high priority among division and unit leaders, and serving as a source of ongoing education and development are cited as being of high importance. It is evident that placing assessment as a duty “add-on” will not suffice. Student affairs divisional leaders are advised to consider all division-wide cultural drivers and obstacles to developing assessments that improve student learning and make tangible contributions to institutional success.

Finding 4: Achieving a Role in the Accreditation Cycle

During the document analysis portion of this study, it was evident that division of student affairs efforts in student learning, engagement, and overall gains from the out of class experience were well represented throughout accreditation documents. In two cases, the campus seemed to come together as an integrated whole focused on student learning. In the third case, student affairs were present and prominently reflected in the documents, but not to the same degree as the other two model institutions. During the interviews,

specific student affairs contributions contained in accreditation reports were discussed with participants and questions were presented about how these contributions evolved to the point of inclusion in the annual accreditation cycle.

Institution 1

When student affairs leaders from Institution 1 were asked about their process for contributing to the accreditation reports, it was stated that:

While the academic side is still sort of in a flux getting things situated and all that, so they are mostly focused on academic assessment, because they haven't really been doing it in any systematic way. Where in student affairs, we have had an assessment [committee] and have been working on assessment since 1995. So while we had our last accreditation site visit, student affairs got an accommodation for their assessment work; the academic side and the [general education] part got recommendations to get going. So we are ahead in our thinking and our assessment work; we are ahead of where the academic side is currently (DSAA).

It was noted by participants from this institution that the student affairs division was never explicitly charged or asked to provide any comprehensive assessments of student learning; the fact that the division had an assessment focus meant that it had many contributions to offer.

Narratives regarding student support services are required by the regional accreditation agency in which Institution 1 is a part of. The leader of the student affairs assessment unit was able to collect and synthesize all related service and student learning contributions from the various student affairs units to prepare accreditation report drafts. This person saw herself as the link between the self-study steering committee and each of the departments within the student affairs division. Further, she noted that student affairs

departments were very familiar with the accreditation process because they were submitting findings and reports regularly throughout the process. She said “they were able to see drafts, because I made sure those were available to people so they could see how their unit or department was being represented and how it was being linked up with the academic stuff” (DSAA). The student affairs assessment unit was also involved in numerous site visit meetings by accreditors and was able to involve various student affairs departments with site-visit forums to engage directly with the accreditors.

Questions were asked regarding the level of familiarity by student affairs professionals with accreditation expectations. It appears that most student affairs professionals have an understanding of the process and the requirements, but may be limited in understanding the full scope of accreditation institutionally. When asked to what degree accreditation influences student affairs practices, a participant offered:

I think we look at it more like, if we do good practice, if we do good assessment, then accreditation is no big deal because when it comes time to show that stuff, we’ve got a body of work to show. So, does accreditation drive it? I don’t think so really (DSAA).

Institution 2

Institution 2 incorporated division of student affairs learning assessments into the accreditation program. This was due in large part to the initiative of a particular Vice Chancellor outside of the student affairs division who directed the division to “make sure that student life is being represented in the accreditation review” (DSAA). It was noted that historically student affairs contributions were not a major issue, but are considered

much more important at present time. Participants discussed that the student affairs division had already “understood the importance of aligning the work we do with the common academic language” (DSAA) and that preliminary conversations had been occurring, but “when [the Vice Chancellor] says ‘this is happening for accreditation, you must do that’ - one must respond” (DSAA). It was also shared that the student affairs connection to accreditation was considered as a fairly new consideration and that student affairs professionals “know that it’s important, but they may or may not understand why” (DSAA).

The fact that the student affairs division at Institution 2 fully adopted the general education goals as their own priority was noted as easing the process to create assessment reports from the outside the classroom area in a manner that more easily connects to the language of accreditation reports.

Institution 3

Given the political context requiring caution on the part of the student affairs division forays into student learning language shared in interviews with members of Institution 3, it was surprising to see the level of student affairs contributions to the accreditation documents. Somewhat similar to Institution 2, clear expectations for student affairs units to contribute to the accreditation process were put forward by senior leaders, in this case by the Vice President overseeing student affairs. However, the leader of the student affairs assessment unit appeared to be highly motivated as well. This participant shared:

I think that [student affairs presence in accreditation documents] happened because I can be a pain in the butt. And, I wanted to make sure that we were represented, so I probably sent too much information, maybe. But because we have a central office that is in charge of assessment for student affairs, we have that way to impact documents like that (DSAA).

Student affairs interview participants from Institution 3 conveyed that they have developed a practice of preparing and sharing assessment reports with institutional research and the academic affairs assessment unit on a continual basis, whether or not the reports are requested. Efforts to connect student affairs assessment and affiliated reports with institutional learning goals and to institutional strategic plans were cited as important strategies to achieve a role in the accreditation process. Since a high number and wide variety of division of student affairs assessment reports had been shared over time, several members of the division were able to take part on various accreditation self-study teams to offer contributions.

Student affairs division contributions to accreditation were described as also being the result of a top-down approach from a president who was cited as stating “I want an integrated strategic planning and budgeting process on this campus, and I want good assessment” (IR/EA). A very committed (recently departed) vice president was also discussed as a key leader “helping departments and then those departments helped staff members and faculty understand how they work and how they contributed to the strategic plan” (IR/EA). Participants acknowledged that much work is still ahead and that developing a role to make stronger accreditation contributions on the part of the student affairs division would take several more years. A participant shared “I would say that you have to remind people periodically. But if you make it part of the culture and part of who

we are then it's not about accreditation; it's who we are as an institution" (IR/EA). A participant added:

It used to be that people chose what to measure themselves. Now they are being told 'great that you are measuring that, but we want you to measure this too, and this other thing, and we want you to take these two measurements and see how they compare to each other, so it has gone up a big notch, or a number of notches, I would say (DSAA).

A leader from institutional research/educational assessment discussed her philosophy that "if it's not documented, it didn't happen" (IR/EA). When discussing the role of student affairs division in the accreditation report, she shared her perspective about the crucial role of a student affairs assessment unit in making such contributions. In her own words:

If it were just up to institutional research to collect that sort of thing, we wouldn't get the context at all. We don't get student affairs to be honest with you. They [assessment office] have a great effect on student affairs. I think our team report mentioned the fact that the use of the assessment of student affairs was extensive. And we never would have been able to accomplish that. And moreover, and not just for accreditation; it's just useful to them. They've been able to demonstrate that they use information, and if they didn't have an office that was able to do that, they wouldn't be able to make those decisions (IR/EA).

She concluded with "this may sound very odd for someone in academic affairs, but I would say the people on campus who are most directive about assessment are student affairs, not academic affairs." When discussing the capacity of institutional research/educational assessment to direct academic affairs, she asserted that "we can't afford to be directive because that can get ugly really fast" (IR/EA).

Literature Support

Banta et al. (2009) discuss in their book *Designing Effective Assessment: Principles and Profiles of Good Practice* that “student affairs professionals have long recognized the need to move from counting the number of students who attend an event to collecting meaningful information about how effectively the goals of the event or program are being met” and that “now student affairs professionals are being explicit about developing program goals for promoting student development and using direct measures of student learning” (p. 199). The evolution of measures beyond attendance and student satisfaction are considered highly important for student affairs divisions to enter into conversations of institutional effectiveness through accreditation.

In her book *Promoting Integrated and Transformative Assessment*, Wehlburg (2008) discusses that “all regional accreditation organizations require assessment of the entire institution and want to see how the institution demonstrates that it is achieving what it says it is” (p. 101). A Middle States Commission on Higher Education (of which the University of Delaware is a member) publication *Principles for Good Practices* contains a section titled “What an Accrediting Commission Should Reasonably Expect of an Institution.” The section calls out five topical areas of expectation: *role of student learning in accreditation; documentation of student learning; compilation of evidence; stakeholder involvement; and capacity building*. Expectation #3 is of particular interest for this project and states:

Compilation of evidence. Evidence of student learning is derived from multiple sources, such as courses, curricula, and co-curricular programming, and includes effects of both intentional and unintentional learning experiences. Evidence

collected from these sources is complementary and portrays the impact on the student of the institution as a whole.

In his book *Planning and Assessment in Higher Education: Demonstrating Institutional Effectiveness*, Middaugh (2010) notes in a section “what are accreditors looking for?” (p. 91) that:

“the standard for assessing student learning requires clearly articulated statement of expected outcomes from *all* programs that aim to foster student learning and development. To the extent that units such as the Division of Student Life and the Division of Residence Life are engaged in student development activity on campus, they must create, implement, and measure specific expected outcomes from their activity. Counseling services, career planning services, student activities centers, and the like clearly fall into this category” (p. 92).

While it has been asserted many times in this paper that assessment should be focused on improving student learning and that a Division of Student Life could experience many gains by fully engaging in the accreditation cycle, it is clear that accreditors expect it.

In the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) publication *Accreditation and the Role of the Student Affairs Educator*, Bayless (n.d.) discusses that there is little need to be hesitant about engaging in the formal accreditation process “If a division of student affairs consistently uses good strategic planning and assessment practices, focusing primarily on student learning and institutional effectiveness, the process of preparing for the self-study and site visit will be fairly straightforward” (p. 26). She also discusses as side benefit of full engagement in the accreditation process as it “allows a division of student affairs to demonstrate to the campus-at-large the ways it contributes to the institutional mission and to student learning” (p. 26).

Schuh (2015) discusses in *The Journal of Student Affairs Inquiry* in his article “Assessment in Student Affairs: How Did We Get Here?” that there are two purposes for assessment in student affairs: “These purposes include assessment for accountability and assessment for improvement (p. 8). Schuh (2015) goes on to note that “student affairs educators owe it to their constituents...and if student affairs educators cannot demonstrate, systematically, that they add value to the education of students, it is logical to ask why institutions need to invest precious resources to the division of student affairs” (p. 8-9). While Schuh’s implication that an absence of demonstrating value may lead to an absence of existence is certainly important, Ewell and Jankowski (2015) in their chapter titled “Accreditation as Opportunity” in the book *Using Evidence of Student Learning to Improve Higher Education* comment that “institutions that engage in assessment because they genuinely see value in understanding student experiences and student learning are able to supply evidence to satisfy accreditation requirements *without* sacrificing internal improvement efforts (p. 158). In their discussion of moving “beyond a posture of compliance by implementing assessment in a manner that is genuinely useful” (p. 158) they state: “the lesson is simple but profound: institutions that begin with improvement in mind get information that can simultaneously serve accreditation, while those that begin with accreditation in mind do not usually get information that is useful for improvement” (p. 158).

In her chapter “Changing Roles and Responsibilities in Student Affairs Research and Assessment” in the book *New Realities in the Management of Student Affairs*, Bresciani (2012) comments that “as we experience the generation and application of

research and assessment today in the student affairs profession, we can't move very far without recognizing the importance of accountability for general learning" and adds that "it would be wise [for student affairs professionals] to consider how their programs and collaborative partnerships contribute to general learning outcomes" (p. 116). In a general less-than complimentary observation of the student affairs profession, Bresciani (2012) relays the following story and sentiment:

Many student affairs professionals find humor in the notion that they cannot explain what they do in a manner that their parents or partners can understand. While I made these same comments a few years ago and laughed aloud at myself, I find myself no longer laughing. The importance of our ability to translate our research- and outcome-based assessment results into terminology that those outside the profession can understand grows increasingly more every day (p. 118).

Schuh (2015) supplements Bresciani's view with the following narrative:

The future of assessment is clear. It is not going away. That is, those who believe that stalling before getting started with assessment and assuming that it will go the way of management by objectives or other so-called managerial fads are badly mistaken...Units will continue to have to demonstrate that they are accomplishing their goals and contributing to the mission of their institution. I fear that those who refuse to engage in assessment will put their units at risk (p. 9).

In the preface to *Integrating Higher Education Planning and Assessment: A Practical Guide*, Hollowell et al. (2006) discuss that "good planning must include sustained analysis and assessment of progress toward goals and objectives" (p. 1). They go on to state "let us be clear: imperatives of accreditation aside, institutions must plan effectively to be effective" (p. 6). Student affairs services and programs, while not a central point of the discussion, are clearly included in conversations of institutional effectiveness in regard to student learning. Should student affairs divisions continue to

make claims of impact on student learning and development, then they should be expected to provide evidence of student gains through the annual accreditation cycles.

Finding 5: Developing Effective Use of Technology

Technology emerged as a key factor in the study for two primary reasons. First, it was a necessary supportive foundation toward achieving alignment between student affairs and broader institutional priorities and efforts. And second, it allowed the student affairs units to manage the overwhelming nature of the assessment process.

It was expressed through multiple interviews with model institutions that measurable contributions to broad institutional aims could not be achieved without capitalizing on technology. Key roles in the use of technology to effectively capture data, connect data points, track indicators for strategic planning and improvement purposes, communication, warehousing, compliance collection, and to have relatively efficient means to coordinate formative and summative assessments were presented by the study participants.

Technology played a key factor in developing a robust data collection and analysis program and in connecting results to existing institutional data sets. Participants discussed that numerous decisions related to both software and hardware were necessary to build an assessment program, aligning assessment efforts, and building capacity to contribute to institutional accreditation processes. Data points about student affairs contributions are complicated to collect and often include elusive indirect measures of

student success. To develop measureable contributions in a manner that brought student affairs into the accreditation process, each of the model institutions needed to develop a means of data collection that supported larger institutional aims and utilize technology to demonstrate an alignment with institutional priorities. As student affairs has often historically relied on attendance counts and satisfaction in assessment practices, advanced technology was not necessary. More technologically sophisticated approaches were deemed necessary by the model institution to undertake examination of success indicators related to student learning, persistence, and graduation.

Institution 1

Institution 1 placed an emphasis and focus on developing data management and warehousing software in order to easily share and disseminate data in an electronic format across a broad set of users. Participants commented on the importance of designing warehouse systems that were easily accessible and had utility for direct and indirect stakeholders. This institution also invested in survey software and rubric software in order to gather both breadth and depth of student learning.

In addition, Institution 1 established contracts with the assessment vendor Campus Labs (formerly Student Voice) with the Baseline platform to assist with survey design, reporting, distribution, and warehousing and the Compliance Assist platform which offers an integrated system for accreditation, planning, assessment, and program review. Compliance Assist was referenced as a key resource for managing the strategic

planning process and a means to have an accessible site to keep all assessment plans and reports.

Institution 1 also invested in hardware features to capture data points at the moment of the educational experience. Platforms that allow for portable devices were utilized and made available centrally so that each unit did not have to make independent investments. Institution 1 also highlighted the value of a centralized division software for each affiliated unit in student affairs.

Institution 2

Institution 2 student affairs started their assessment program with Campus Labs/Student Voice vendor software but later created their own in-house system that best met their organizational needs. A participant from Institution 2 noted that “One of the things that grows out of that system is an involvement transcript” (DSAU). The involvement transcript links to students’ personal development plan and makes it “very easy for students to track and record their overall experience and incorporate it into their personal development plan” (DSAU). This participant added “The goal is to get everyone linked and on board” (DSAU).

Institution 2 maintained one vendor product, Collegiate Link for a centralized database combined with student ID swipe card systems that capture event, activity, and workshop attendance. A participant discussed that the tool is used for more than tracking and that “we use it for the reflection forms” (DSAA). These forms included tailored reflective questions that were sent to students during and after engagement experiences.

Interview participant noted that they get a higher response rate when they collect assessment at the end of an event. “On our campus, we struggle with response rate to surveys online” (DSAA). He added that “the technology works great, but our culture is such that we will get a better response right there and then at the end of the program rather than responding after the fact” (DSAA). As information is gathered on attendance, it can be connected to institutional data points. “We can split that by demographics” (DSAA). The study participant made it a point to note that although it is valuable to have a good idea about who is attending various engagement opportunities and initiatives, the key “question is learning” (DSAA) and this allows them to capture learning in real time.

Institution 2 participants discussed that swipe technology is used in multiple ways around campus. In discussing student comfort with such tracking, a participant noted:

That was one of my concerns when I arrived here. Would students want to report to us? It has not been a problem. Students are simply accustomed to it – you need to see I am here, fine. Also, if we serve any food at an event, we are required to present an attendance list to our food vendor. We are upfront that we may send you a survey afterward, but we say that you need to either swipe your card or sign in to enter because we need a roster of who was here ...when any food is part of an initiative. That has calmed any concerns. It has been fine... When the involvement connects to the co-curricular transcript or e-portfolio, it makes sense to students. They are able to track their experiences and represent them better on a resume, for example (DSAA).

Institution 2 has invested heavily in electronic/online portfolios. The portfolios are considered to be simultaneously education strategy and valuable assessment resources. The portfolios include digital personal development plans with both curricular and co-curricular components along with student reflections throughout such experiences. They are described in an Institution 2 internal document as “A flexible online portfolio

and web-page presentation tool that allows students to plan, mark progress, and reflect on their college experience,” the plan is “Implemented in first-year seminars and is easily adapted to courses, departments, and programs so that students can continue to use the [online portfolio] throughout their college experience to guide their learning.” Internal documents further described that “Components of the [online portfolio] include a semester in review, personal learning goals, and a semester-by-semester plan” that “Allows for reflection and holistic approach to learning and ‘meaning making’.” An actual student example of a portfolio from Institution 2 was provided as part of the study and included sections, such as a personal introduction, a statement of educational aspirations, a formalized educational path/plan, stated career objectives, featured academic samples, highlights from co-curricular experience, and a copy of resume.

Institution 2 provided perhaps the strongest student learning philosophy as a driver of the technology applications. Study participants discussed their capability to collect information in real time (formative), clearly connect the information to outcomes and to communicate this to students (reinforce), track student involvement/engagement over time, build in overall assessment based on the types of activities/learning opportunities students are part of (summative), and to connect to institutional data (common bank of questions). Institution 2 also utilized both home-designed rubrics and AAC&U VALUE rubrics to examine application and integration of knowledge and reported that the rubrics helped to provide clear descriptions of the intended learning gains to students. The product “iRubric” developed by the vendor RCampus was cited by

study participants as a highly flexible and useful tool toward education and assessment practices.

A final use of technology combined to facilitate student learning and assessment by Institution 2 is a video platform. Students participating in international/global experiences, service learning, and experiential learning are provided with reflective prompts and encouraged to create a video reflection on the provided prompts.

Institution 3

Institution 3 utilized assessment technology in a unique manner based on their institutional culture. Study participants noted “We don’t have any system such as e-portfolio. I think on my campus that would not be...it would be very revolutionary for us to do that because there is a lot of fear on our campus that e-portfolios and those sorts of things that somehow they would be used as a way to criticize departments” (IR/EA). The political environment led to more subtle uses of technology to capture data points outside the classroom for assessment purposes.

Similar to Institution 2, Institution 3 uses scanning technology to capture and examine student engagement and involvement, though utilizes a Bluetooth enabled miniature reader that maximizes portability and can be used to scan a barcode on the student identification cards. A study participant discussed:

We use these to scan attendance at a variety of events which we can then cross-reference that ID number to demographics in our [data] file to get a picture of students who are attending and using a service. And, that has helped with working with departments to where we get them to think through their services. ... We were able to give that department a profile of who is using the service, but also who is not, and who are the repeat kinds of users. Are these freshmen? Are

they transfer students? Who are they? And that really helps them also to think through the resources they are attributing to things....It allows for a conversation and future planning – so, you had [X] students, but your event was targeting [Y] students; what do you think was happening? Why did it happen? (DSAA).

Students did not express any level of concern with activity tracking. Study participant commented that “Students think they’re really cool. ...It interests them in what we are doing. So, we have conversations about them” (DSAA). The participant stated, “I can’t tell you what a difference this has made for us” (DSAA). The use of scanning technology allowed for members of the central student affairs division to aggregate data on a broad level. Study participants were able to provide information that some services grew and some services were eliminated as a result of effective tracking and the use of the tracking data in comparison with broader institutional aims.

Institution 3 also used vendor software provided by Collegiate Link (a platform offered by StudentVoice/CampusLabs) and it was expressed that “we use [it] for managing involvement transcript functionality for students” (DSAA). Students register their involvement in campus organizations, track participation in events/organizations, and “we can send them an assessment on that event rather quickly” (DSAA). In addition:

We use it a lot for reporting as well as to determine how many students are involved in various things. It collects service hours so we are just starting to use it to track service hours....[Prior], we didn’t have any type of centralized platform for knowing what students were involved in. And this has very much helped us get a picture of what our student life is like. ...[The platform] includes everything – Greek Life, Honors Society, all civic engagement related activity (DSAA).

The software also allows for tailored reflection questions to be included. Students make choices about what they want included on their involvement transcript and can easily record their involvement on campus for their entire undergraduate career.

Institution 3 developed customized data dashboards to build a platform to collect and sort data points directly related to strategic plan aims. The dashboard allows for several stakeholders to see indicators of success, the data points that contribute to the understanding of the student success area, and progress at the division-level. Participants described their dashboard as a major information hub providing a wealth of information that did not exist previously for review and decision making purposes. Using technology to allow for broad based data collection and comparison among multiple data points also afforded Institution 3 to build “a profile of an at-risk student” (IR/EA), and utilize an early warning program, described as a “collaboration between our department and other departments” (IR/EA).

A unique use of technology was discussed by study participants from Institution 3 in terms of using social media platforms to engage with the campus community on assessment findings. A participant shared that beyond reporting on student involvement in an annual report:

We’ve been working on a marketing methodology of getting out all of our, what we call ‘data nuggets’ to different components of the campus constituency to kind of invite them to be interested or curious in knowing more. So, we are working on a way to develop all of our ‘aha’ moments of what we have found. We are trying to develop a kind of social media way to get information out to staff and students and parents, just basic kind of information on a more regular basis, but in a way that they can look at it and it would make them more interested in what we are doing (DSAA).

A brief summary of technology use by institutions in this study is displayed in the following table 4.4.

Table 4.4: Summary of Study Institutions' Technology Use

Technology	Institution 1	Institution 2	Institution 3
Vendor software	X	X	X
Custom software		X	
Common data hubs/dashboards	X	X	X
E-portfolios	X	X	
Co-curricular/involvement transcript	X	X	X
Push reflections		X	X
Scan/swipe hardware		X	X
Social media			X
iRubric		X	

Literature Support

Many of the assessment efforts of the model institutions are supported by literature and best-practices publications. In a recent publication *Student Affairs Assessment: Theory to Practice*, authors discuss many of the data collection points, general approaches, and benefits described by the institutions in the study. They highlight the improvement-oriented nature of technology in assessment work toward generating knowledge, and increasing efficiency as well as effectiveness (Henning, Roberts, 2016, p. 280). Specific to student affairs units, the key approaches and recommended uses of data collection tools are addressed: survey software, card scanners, electronic response capture technology, social media, learning management systems, and voice recording. In addition, data-analysis tools, data presentation and visualization, and integrated products are discussed in detail (Henning & Roberts, 2016, pp. 281-287), supporting the notion that technology plays a key role in student affairs units' capacity to align with the broader institutional aims.

Technology has allowed the integration of data from multiple sources, such as student information, survey data, and program/service attendance/usage. This provides the development of models to predict performance, a more accurate picture of programs and services, and an indication of improvements. It also creates more efficiency by not collecting information that is already available. (Henning & Roberts, 2016, p. 292)

The authors speak to the importance of student affairs professionals harnessing that technology in meaningful ways to best support student success, learning, as well as accountability and compliance.

Several other leading scholars in student affairs speak to the potential and capacity of utilizing technology as foundational to supporting and sustaining change and innovation in student affairs (Barr et al., 2014), moving from reactive to pro-active models with focus on interactivity and student engagement and rethinking its service model (Ellis, 2015). Ellis (2015) notes that “Because of extensive technological advances, the student affairs division has the potential to dramatically improve services to a diverse student body” (p. 159). Utilization of data hubs/dashboards, which was discussed by institutions in the study is also highlighted as a model of best practice in student affairs. “Dashboard indicators represent a significant technological development for monitoring, analyzing, and managing institutional effectiveness, including student learning and student affairs” (Mitchell & Rider, 2013, p. 80). Whether the dashboards are set up as operational, analytical, or strategic in nature, the authors “believe they afford assessment personnel with the opportunity to gain new insights from volumes of available data and to draw stakeholders’ attention to the positive activities and outcomes of student affairs and higher education” (Mitchell & Rider, 2013, p. 80). Bentrin and Elling (2015) speak to future developments of connecting technology and assessment,

specifically through social networking media (ex: PhotoVoice) and integrated data analytics/big data (p. 80).

In the near future, assessment coordinators may be expected to conduct advanced inferential analyses on multiple sources of data for a variety of purposes, including the impact of student affairs programs on academic success, retention, and time to degree. Other possibilities are assessing student learning outcomes, student skill development, and determining the impact of participation on academic and social engagement. (Bentrim & Elling, 2015, p. 82)

Finally, moving beyond involvement tracking/transcripts toward a broadly integrated electronic portfolio that incorporates reflection on learning, engagement, and provides avenues for planning and assessment is a valuable consideration for student affairs. For that purpose, publications *Electronic Portfolios 2.0: Emergent Research on Implementation and Impact* (Cambridge, Cambridge, & Yancey, 2009) and *Eportfolios for Lifelong Learning and Assessment* (Cambridge, 2010) serve as helpful guides of recommended practices and innovative approaches.

Finding 6: Establishing Partnerships and Collaborative Efforts

In a joint report *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning*, the American Association for Higher Education, the American College Personnel Association, and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, authors propose ten Learning Principles and numerous steps for collaborative action (1998). Among their assertions, they discuss that “learning is strongly affected by the educational climate...” (para. 6) and that the “educational climates in which learning occurs

best...involve all constituents – faculty, students, staff, alumni, employers, family, and others – in contributing to student learning” (para. 6). Through the interviews and best-practices literature, the necessary nature of a partnership-oriented and highly collaborative approach emerged over and over. Each of the three model programs in this study share unique pathways to the development of interdependent relationships with key members of academic affairs, institutional research professionals, students, and other important stakeholders. Each strongly assert the critical nature of such partnerships.

Institution 1

Institution 1 prides itself on developing collaborative roles with students and involving students in a wide array of university decision making processes, and as such it was no real surprise that the participants began the partnership conversation with a student collaboration example. Student affairs professionals convened first-year students to examine NSSE results and explored questions such as “what do you think we should do to improve our performance on this?” and “what’s your impression of how we’re doing on this?” and “knowing how your peers answer this, what could we do to have better scores if we wanted to have a higher level of performance?” (DSAA). The student feedback and insight appears to be highly valued by both the student affairs division and the institution, and it was described as building investment among students in institutional priorities.

Institution 1 has structural means to facilitate the connections between student affairs and academic affairs. Uniquely, student affairs professional staff are included on

the faculty senate organizational structure and are appointed to numerous committees and on the executive council. The inherent advantages of being at the table and a part of discussions and decisions appear to create both planned and seemingly serendipitous unplanned connection points. One participant shared:

Well it's like... I got an email yesterday from the chair of the [general education] implementation faculty team, saying 'can we get together some time this term and spend some time talking about how we might go about assessing the [general education], because you guys have been involved in assessing some of the things that we're looking at. So, and this was a full professor, I don't have a particular relationship with this professor, other than I know her, and she knows me, and we've been on committees together before, but that's the kind of relationship that we try to foster with faculty. But I think it helps that we are sitting at the same table (DSAA).

The participant added:

I think we do a pretty good job of breaching the gap between faculty and student affairs, part of it because of our structure, and being on faculty senate committees which puts us in contact with faculty. And part of it, because there's a history of that, there's a tradition of that here, and maybe it is because of the faculty senate structure. I mean, I remember several years ago it came before faculty senate that maybe the [professional staff] ought to have their own association, and be split off. And, the faculty senate overwhelmingly said no...and that's the end of it. So there's something about our faculty here that appreciate the student affairs perspective (DSAA).

Beyond the unique senate structure, participants from Institution 1 also described numerous programs that cross boundaries effectively and facilitate a partner-oriented approach. For example, a civic engagement and community service center operated and resourced by student affairs was described to have substantial faculty and academic program involvement as was a collaboration between the recreation sports program and the college of health on a type of health leadership certification program. The program is described to have strong and clear joint learning outcomes and “a wonderful assessment

project for assessing the learning of students” (VPSA). Institution participants also describe that the majority of living learning communities have an academic program sponsor with numerous programs involving faculty members living in the residence hall. Sponsoring colleges or departments are required to complete a proposal, and the college designs how the faculty position will contribute to achieving the goals of that particular learning community. “So they have to connect what the faculty’s role will be to the desired learning outcomes of the program and to describe the approach that will be taken to make that contribution” (DSAA). An entrepreneurship program and e-portfolio model were also described as strong points of intersection between student affairs and academic programs.

Even though Institution 1 has unique structural components that facilitate the student affairs and faculty connection points, the path toward shared investment in assessment, in particular assessment on the out-of-class student learning environment, followed a similar set of challenges faced by institutions without such structural advantages. A participant shared the following story:

One of the best things that we did in 2002, our institution, we have lot of information about students, but it wasn’t being used. We collect a lot of information about students just by enrolling, you know, in our student information system. But in our student affairs, we just didn’t feel like we had good information about student experience. So we were looking for a university-wide survey and we landed on the NSSE, which was just kind of coming into being in those years, and we administered that. And I wrote up the results into a report and distributed that report to the president, and the provost, and deans and all around; and presented it from the faculty response. And I got the response that usually comes from the faculty senate. ‘How rigorous is this?’ and ‘what was your return?’ and blah blah blah, and ‘our students wouldn’t say that’ and blah blah. And I said ‘well, this is what it says. You can take it or leave it, but it is our student’s response about how engaged they feel and how they feel they’re doing these kinds of things.’ And so I administered that every year for about five years.

And presented it to the faculty senate and sent these reports to the deans and all this stuff, and did PowerPoint presentations to different groups and so forth. And, it was always people saying ‘well our student’s wouldn’t be like that, it must be another college’s students saying that.’ So I began feeding colleges the student at large data and then also their [college specific] student data. And then, I don’t know what happened, but around 2005-2006 all of the sudden student engagement was the idea of the faculty. And it was like ‘ah well we have to pay attention to the student engagement data, what else can you tell us about student engagement?’ So in some way it gave some legitimacy to what we were doing. And now, every year, we don’t give the NSSE every year anymore, but when we do give it, I get requests from deans and other academic advisors ‘what does the data look like now? Are they better now?’ and I am able to show some trends and some things like that that I wasn’t able to do before. And, in a lot of places, the NSSE is done by institutional research or by an academic department, but here we just decided to do it and we paid for it. And now I’m the NSSE guru on campus, which isn’t necessarily true but I am the one who has that data. So, you know, I think that opened up some conversation doors between student affairs and academic affairs (DSAA).

When asked about potential tensions between academic affairs and student affairs in roles, a participant offered “no, there’s not a problem with that” (VPSA). There is an institutional recognition that student affairs professionals do not “own the curriculum, that’s owned by the teaching faculty. But that students do learn from extra-curricular or co-curricular experience, and that, in fact, we do offer a co-curriculum” (VPSA).

Institution 2

Institution 2 started its path to developing partnerships and collaborations with recognition of disconnect between those in academic affairs and those in student affairs. A participant noted “ice cream socials and research do not mix; our common ground is in between” (DSAU). It was shared that “our priorities need to shift toward research if we

want to bridge the gaps and have a role in student learning” (DSAU). When discussing productive strategies, it was expressed that “[we] cannot just invite faculty to a pizza party; we have to put ourselves to different environments... many faculty see student affairs as superfluous, draining resources from what matters – teaching” (DSAU).

Another participant commented that “in student affairs, we have a lot of ground to cover to make our role in learning relevant in academic setting” (DSAU). With that understanding though, it was discussed that in order for partnerships to exist, the common point to tie seemingly mutually exclusive cultures together must be student learning. A participant summed up the approach with the following: “In partnerships and interactions, [I am] waiting for two words – ‘students’ and ‘learning’ – when those come up, we have it; when they don’t, we do not have much to talk about” (IR/EA).

Strong student learning outcome assessment by student affairs was described as essential means to develop collaborative roles focused on student learning. Participants referenced a need for evidence to start the conversation between academic and student affairs and offered “faculty approached student affairs to work together after seeing examples of the student affairs learning outcome research” (DSAU). A participant added “faculty stood up and took notice. ...[It is] powerful when we share and demonstrate how we support institutional learning outcomes. ...[We] need to share and need to talk the same language” (DSAU). The following story was shared as a demonstration of collaboration stemming from a shift in language:

Student affairs professionals can talk passionately about the work that they do. It is much more difficult to express it in an assessable manner, with clear learning outcome, and with very specific strategic ways. What we have to do is we have to

be able to speak the language of the academy! What I tell people is, here is where I gain trust, even on this campus. When I sit down with an engineering faculty, and I say, you know what, you and I have so much more in common than you would ever believe. And he says, no, there is no way. And I begin to talk to him, and I say let me tell you something...I said, my laboratory is the campus recreation center. My laboratory is student housing. My laboratory is a club or an organization. My laboratory is an alternative spring break. And, I set a common set of learning outcomes, and then I take that student through this experience using that as my laboratory, and then I identify how much they have learned on the back side. And do you know, he almost dropped on the floor. He never thought about it that way. In fact, now we are partnering to teach a credited course in leadership, and he used the words – a co-curricular laboratory that we have on this campus. So, what I am saying to you is once you get this finished, let's partner in writing some type of book, or some type of article, about the student affairs laboratories, and being able to articulate, using the language of the academy, what we do, why we do it, how we do it, and the relevance of student affairs on college campuses (VPSA).

A participant added “faculty were looking for a learning laboratory” (DSAU) and an opportunity to apply theory to practice. In addition, “for faculty it was an opportunity to expand their research through the collaboration” (DSAU). Participants also discussed looser forms of structural collaborations such as the use of a common bank of assessment questions which made it easy to connect data across different areas of campus. Electronic portfolios and a student involvement transcript were also discussed as means to connect academic components and out of class components.

It was discussed in an earlier portion of the findings that the student affairs division at Institution 2 fully adopted the general education goals as the top student learning priority narrative in the division. Participants expressed that it was important to demonstrate what, where, and how students were learning throughout their participation and engagement in campus initiatives and programmatic efforts, and it was considered essential to draw connections between in-class and out-of-class learning opportunities.

Out of class experiences are mapped and directly connected to general education outcomes, and assessment measures are applied to answer “how we know students are learning what is intended” (DSAA). A participant noted that it did not seem appropriate to distinguish between cognitive and non-cognitive learning and that “one affects the other and students don’t separate” (DSAU). The participant discussed:

How do students respond to a surprise, challenge, or adversity? We need to assess creativity and critical problem solving vs. just technical skills and knowledge acquisition. [We need to] transport the learning to a new circumstance or situation...should not assess learning in the same set of experiences, [we] have to transfer and apply...the best test is change the environment. Take the same material and explain it to other audiences or apply it in other environments; that is the test...[we] cannot assess every nuance and have to pick some key performance indicators and have a clear purpose of why and what we want to accomplish (DSAU).

The student affairs division at Institution 2, similar to the other participating institutions developed structurally interconnected approaches connecting academic and student affairs. A collaborative student leadership certificate program was described in which student can receive up to 9 credit hours. The program learning outcomes are directly connected to general education learning goals. Joint appointments of personnel with obligations to a specific college and to the student affairs division were described as effective in identifying opportunities where efforts and resources can be combined to improve student learning. Many of the structured collaborations occur in first-year student programs through such approaches as faculty-student affairs co-teaching FYE courses and through student involvement office programs connecting with the university First-Year program led by an academic affairs unit. It was also noted that the first-year reader program is viewed as a strong collaborative effort with in-class and outside of

class components strategically tied. A participant noted the faculty and student affairs professions were “intentional on how we are interacting in each other’s areas so that we can work together more” (DSAU). Formalized interactions and joint teaching responsibilities “give credibility to the partnership” (DSAU).

One participant shared the following recommendations pertinent to developing partner-oriented approaches to student learning:

Start small and grow toward integrated practice. Tell your story. Use shared language in learning outcomes; there is clarity in common goals. We [student affairs] don’t always share well. Assessment is not over when we have a report. Tailor the story to the faculty audience; share what your students are gaining. Find your allies...common interests and priorities. Explore the benefits to all involved – faculty, staff, students” (DSAU).

A participant concluded the conversation about partnerships with the following recommendation:

Academic affairs in the classroom provide the formal learning experience and the co-curricular and student affairs provide the formative learning experiences, thereby creating a holistic learning environment. We have to be partners with our colleagues in academic affairs where one is providing a formal learning experience and the other is providing a formative learning experience. We have to be able to clearly articulate what we do, why we do it, and validate how it’s done as a profession. And then the final thing, I think, is we have to be able to articulate what we do in the academy using the academy language. We know that we do it, but the way we assess what we do has to become more formal so that we can articulate it using the language of the academy (VPSA).

Institution 3

Almost every example provided by institution 3 involved partnerships and connections between academic and student affairs. These included Living Learning Communities, service learning and civic engagement, first year experience program, etc.

As noted in earlier findings, student affairs professionals who were interviewed expressed a strongly held belief that partnership was the only way forward and it would not be considered acceptable for student affairs to approach student learning in an isolated framework.

Assessment became a collaborative vehicle for Institution 3 and a participant shared the following evolution story:

Our office was originally called the [name omitted] and we dealt with institutional effectiveness for the entire campus. So, that was our role. And, we were not focused just on the division of student affairs, however, because of how [the office] that started on this campus was within student affairs, we had a direct report to the vice president for student affairs. One of our pieces of what we did was assessment, evaluation, whatever you wanted to use for the term. And as part of that, we contracted with a company called Student Voice, which was a web-based assessment company. They would develop surveys for us and act as our own consultants, but it was totally focused within student affairs. So that was just part of our work, was doing, they designed methodology, focus groups, things like that. When we got a new vice president, and at the same time resources were getting tight, he refocused our efforts totally on assessment. So we were already an intact office with intact staff. And at the same time we have an office of institutional research an assessment, but what was happening was the [state-wide higher education] system administration was requiring more mandated reporting. And their entire focus had to be about student-mandated reporting. So a lot of the work that they had done before on looking at retention, and other kinds of program evaluation and impact wasn't being done, and so that came to us (DSAA).

The participant discussed a high level of student affairs collaboration with the university institutional research office and added:

We work with that office all the time. We share the same data sets; we call ourselves the mini IR for student affairs. Because really what we do is the exact same kinds of things; we have the data, we analyze it, we report on it, we do retention studies, we do lots of migration studies about where students are moving, off-campus, at what point, things like that (DSAA).

As was the case with Institution 1 and 2, NSSE assessment efforts and reports were effectively utilized by Institution 3 to find common areas of interest between academic and student affairs.

Institution 3 participants also offered areas of structural systems that enhance collaborative efforts. A collaborative effort by student affairs, institutional research, and various academic units focused on identifying early-warning indicators of student failure and withdrawal. It was noted that one assessment component indicated that the professionals were not targeting “the right kind of students” (IR/EA) which led to important changes. Furthermore, “They also increased the staff resources to address the needs of those students in the early warning, based on information we had gained from the assessment” (DSAA). The collaborative assessment effort was credited with obtaining additional resources for targeted retention efforts and with the ability to use data to ward off what was described as an uninformed targeting strategies by some in university administration.

A bi-weekly evening lecture series for which students can receive credit for attending was offered as a collaborative student learning effort. Institution 3 has also invested in developing Faculty Masters who are tenured faculty assigned to each residence hall community. The Faculty Master focuses on “encouraging learning outside of the classroom in all types of ways, with activities and with setting up outside lectures, workshops and different types of opportunities for students to interact with each other in an academic way” (DSAU). One participant also described that in some cases, student

affairs and faculty teach together and that there is a perceived benefit for the students having two different types of instructors to approach for questions and mentoring:

This semester, I am teaching with a chemistry professor who is actually the chair of the chemistry department and we are teaching sustainable energy – energy toward the sustainable future course. Not my discipline. But, it is really great to have a content area. He is the specialist in the content area, but it is really great to have the content area so that I can help them with all the issues that they can come upon when they are taking the course. Sometimes they come to me and say that they really did not understand what the professor wants from such and such a topic or they say, ‘I missed class what shall I do.’ They are more likely to approach me with questions knowing that I am a student affairs person. I don’t know how they figured out that I can be helpful to them in showing them direction and showing them what they should do and how. He is there and is very helpful also, but I noticed that they tend to come to me with the types of things they may be afraid to ask a professor. They are sometimes afraid to ask about tutoring, what to do if they miss a class, or how to make up work and those types of things. I notice they come to me more with those types of concerns. If it is a technical question, such as how much energy we use on any particular day, they will be directing the questions to him. Those two roles interact (DSAU).

The cultural context of Institution 3 is most similar to the University of Delaware among the three institutions in this study and their examples of partnership appear focused on helping faculty and the academic affairs areas to succeed rather than asserting a direct or exclusive role in student learning by student affairs. Their approach to partnership may prove instructive.

Literature Support

There is a great deal of support found in best-practices literature on the importance of student affairs and academic affairs partnerships and the potential benefit for enhanced student learning. In *The Handbook for Student Affairs Administration* (2009), Kezar discusses that “partnering with academic colleagues might have been

considered a controversial and difficult activity in the past, but it has now become relatively commonplace...” (p. 406). Much concern has been expressed both within and outside student affairs scholarship and in reports such as “Reinventing Undergraduate Education, A Blueprint for America’s Research Universities” (frequently referred to as the Boyer Report) about the level of disconnect between sectors of the institution that should have the common interest of student learning and student gains in mind. The joint publication (AAHE, ACPA, NASPA) *Powerful Partnerships: A Shared Responsibility for Learning* narrates “only when everyone on campus - particularly academic and student affairs staff - shares responsibility for student learning will we be able to make significant progress for improving it” (p. 1). Partnership in such context is not simply a matter of networking or establishing a feeling of affirmation or inclusiveness by members of the student affairs profession. Partnership is intended to benefit student learning.

Literature on student affairs partnership toward student learning go beyond the faculty-student affairs collaborative efforts. In *Collaboration Between Student Affairs and Institutional Research to Improve Institutional Effectiveness* (2000), Pickering and Sharpe discuss that while institutional research professionals and student affairs professionals “often exist in different worlds, even within the same college or university” (p. 79) these entities have much to offer one another in understanding and improving student success. Included in this discussion is the view that actors in institutional research and in student affairs might approach identical issues from very different, yet valid perspectives. The authors go on to demonstrate gains that can be experienced by both

professional groups through frequent sharing and greater understanding that in turn improves student gains.

Beyond the institutional research conversation, there is a great deal of encouragement in the literature for student affairs to build partnerships in the area of assessment. In a chapter titled *Transformative Assessment Across Student and Academic Affairs*, Wehlburg (2008) notes that many university mission statements include areas such as leadership, citizenship, global understanding, and diversity. She discusses that these “types of broad goals are often not part of a student’s academic major but are intentionally developed within residence life and student affairs areas” (p. 79). When student learning goals in such aforementioned areas are articulated and assessed effectively, measures can add much to the institutional understanding of whether or not the mission is being achieved. She also offers “to truly transform a campus learning environment, it is imperative that the institution look at the whole process rather than just the classroom” (p. 85). It is noteworthy that Wehlburg’s background is in faculty, academic leadership, and accreditation agencies.

In *Assessing for Learning*, Maki (2010) discusses the need for “establishing new or different kinds of relationships and opportunities for dialogue... and involve crossing boundaries to create lasting new partnerships, such as among academic affairs, student affairs, student support services, and those in library and information resources” (p. 4). Maki also addresses that students learn and succeed or fail as a result of a great many influencing factors and institutional actors. The complex process she describes and the

multiple lenses and multiple players appear to require many partnerships throughout the institution in order to effectively capture and improve learning.

Shivers and McMillan (2013) offer a strong site-based example of how collaborative efforts between academic and student affairs can improve both assessment and student learning efforts in their chapter in *Selected Contemporary Assessment Issues*. Their discussion spans from the 1999 development of a strategic plan at the University of Tennessee that “considered ways the academic affairs and student life divisions could work together to improve the experience of undergraduate students” (p. 50). While the shift by student affairs to learning outcome approaches and the data discoveries were impressive, what may be even more instructive from this joining initiative are the challenges faced by the academic affairs and student affairs entities. The absence of common language, including the divergence of how common terms are defined and described and general communication was put forward as items that must be attended to. In addition, authors noted that while collecting data and developing longitudinal records is not uncommon for either student affairs or academic affairs units, the lack of tradition entering such records in shared data bases with commonly understood terms was a major blocking point in efforts to partner on improving student learning.

Schroeder (1999) poses the question “should reform of undergraduate education be a priority for student affairs educators or is this a responsibility of academic administrators and the faculty?” He answers this question unequivocally with “addressing this issue is not an option for student affairs, but an obligation” (p. 134). Schroeder (1999) places the onus on developing the kinds of partnerships necessary to further

student learning to be on the part of student affairs educators in “creating a seamless learning environment” (p. 134) and bemoans the disjointed nature of the student experience and the level of disconnect between (and even within) academic experiences, cocurricular experiences, the residence hall experience, campus employment, and describes areas such as career planning and academic advising as “two ships passing in the night” (p. 135). Schroeder (1999) is quite realistic about the obstacles to partnership, but focuses on an emphasis on opportunities for gains by student affairs, academic affairs, and ultimately students. He offers numerous site based examples to further his case.

Chapter 5

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALIGNING STUDENT AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT WITH INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION IMPROVEMENT GOALS

This chapter presents recommendations and a discussion of potential approaches and considerations that are believed to be helpful guides should decision makers elect to pursue these paths. The recommendations and considerations are offered in good faith as areas viewed as having potential at the University of Delaware with a level of sensitivity to the context, structure, and resources available. The model institutions in this study and the best-practices literature each offer many ideas and potential directions. Not all are considered as feasible or wise directions for the University of Delaware. Only those practices that are deemed applicable to the institutional context of the University of Delaware will appear in this chapter. The researcher has over twelve years of experience as a member of the Division of Student Life which has provided significant exposure and an informed perspective on the topics under discussion. In addition, findings of practices by the model institutions, assertions of leading scholars in student affairs, and initial recommendations were discussed during interviews with the Provost and the Vice President of Student Life to assess desirability, applicability to University of Delaware priorities, and feasibility. The recommendations offered stem directly from the research, but are crafted with the perspective of institutional context.

The organization of the recommendations is modeled on the flow of the findings. The findings coalesced into six thematic areas that followed the evolution of practices of the model institutions over time. The thematic areas in the findings present philosophical, structural, and cultural factors that led to the long-term development of successful practices. Recommendations are articulated thematically, but it is important to note that they reinforce one another, and broadly represent key factors and reinforcing elements.

Recommendation 1: Establish Common Aims through General Education

Objectives and Identify Areas of Division of Student Life Distinctiveness in Student Learning

It is recommended that the Division of Student Life commits to articulating alignment with the General Education Objectives and concurrently articulates areas of education and student development expertise and distinctiveness.

Student affairs professionals have roles with students of all majors and all disciplines at all stages of their undergraduate experience. It is well documented that student learning occurs both within and outside of the classroom environment (Blimling, 2015; Fried, & Associates, 2012; Keeling, 2004; Kuh, 1995; Kuh et al., 1994; Kuh et al., 1991; Pascarella, & Terenzini, 2005) especially on a residential campus such as the University of Delaware. What is not generally well articulated and documented are the specific types and depth of contributions to learning from the outside-the-classroom sector of student affairs (Bresciani et al., 2009), thus limiting the role of the Division of

Student Life can play in institution-wide conversations about student learning and in the periodic accreditation review cycle.

Consideration 1: Formalize the Division of Student Life alignment with General Education Objectives. The University of Delaware, similar to many campuses, has developed a set of General Education Objectives intended to span the disciplines and the curriculum. The University of Delaware Gen-Ed goals, and the recently formalized General Education Objectives, were developed by faculty and were ratified by the Faculty Senate, though they cover a broad range of learning and development areas that intersect with several Division of Student Life aims. The recommendation for the Division of Student Life to articulate and demonstrate alignment with general education objectives stems from four areas: recommendation articulated in the 2010 institutional accreditation review, best practices gathered by model institutions, assertions of student affairs scholars in student affairs, and support from University of Delaware institutional leaders at the time of this study.

The 2010 University of Delaware self-study report to Middle States, under the heading “Effective Integration of Academic Affairs and Student Affairs” (unpublished report), does commend the Division of Student Life for “creating opportunities for student engagement,” but it specifically asserts that “it is important to also engage in assessments that tie those initiatives to specific University General Education Goals.” It can be assumed that this recommendation will be revisited in subsequent accreditation reviews and the Division of Student Life will be asked to address its efforts in this area. Participants in all three model institutions advocated for proactive approaches in

demonstrating capacity and alignment versus waiting until the request is made directly preceding an accreditation cycle. Proactive and ongoing approaches indicate sincere educational efforts and investment on the part of student affairs instead of simply compliance.

Each of the institutions with model approaches in this study found commonality, albeit with unique approaches, to their institutional general education goals. Student affairs divisions at the three model institutions took unique paths, but each focused on an alignment of student affairs student learning energies with institutional general education statements. Institution 1 pioneered the way, Institution 2 adopted general education statements verbatim as their own charge, and Institution 3 adopted a subtle, yet direct support route (Finding 1). General Education Objectives at the University of Delaware provide an exceptional platform for connecting the efforts in both the academic and the student affairs functions toward a common commitment to student learning. Helping our students achieve the General Education Objectives should be felt as a responsibility of all educators at the University of Delaware. The Division of Student Life should articulate decisions about which of the General Education Goals, if any, it deems to be solely the responsibility of the classroom, to which Goals its units contribute directly, and which goals are supported with indirect strategies. To that extent, the discussion in Finding 2 can be utilized by the Division of Student Life as an informative guide of recommended practices developed by the model institutions in this study as well as educational considerations that have been documented in literature.

Support for alignment in general education has also been expressed as an important consideration for student affairs in literature (Allen, 2006; Barr et al., 2014; Bentrim et al., 2015). Finally, the Provost and Vice President of Student Life at the University of Delaware at the time of this study both expressed support of alignment in general education efforts. The Provost spoke of the value and benefit of cross-disciplinary approaches and the importance of helping students become creative, thoughtful, and informed problem solvers and advocates in their community, which would translate to essential skills in their professional careers. He shared several examples of where he saw potential alignment opportunities. For example, he focused on the complexity of the types of knowledge, skills, and competencies that are necessary to formulate a proposal, to lead a change effort, or to advocate based on an organizational need. Such work requires an informed perspective, careful consideration of divergent views on the issue, critical thinking, problem solving, solid communication strategies, capacity to generate support, resilience, and leadership. These learning areas are expressed in general education. He expressed that many examples of such attempts by students come across his desk, exemplifying a wide range of astuteness. He felt that student affairs staff are uniquely positioned to mentor students, provide critique and guidance, and to provide opportunities for application of learning into practice in ways that are perhaps not being met fully in the classroom.

The Vice President of Student Life believed that student affairs units already support many of the learning aims expressed in general education, but shared the complexity of identifying where, when, and how exactly the learning takes place in a

clear and realistic manner. Under his leadership, the Division of Student Life completed a mapping exercise. Units were asked to map all educational strategies to a specified set of domains specific to Student Life. A similar exercise can be completed for the purpose of identifying alignment with General Education Objectives. Beyond identification, new strategies may need to be developed or existing strategies may require modifications in order to achieve more direct alignment with institutional priorities. Both institutional leaders addressed the importance of political considerations of such work by student affairs units, understanding that the academic units assume primary responsibility in the teaching and learning process. These concerns and considerations were consistent with the Findings of Institution 3 in this study. Bresciani et al. (2009) recommend a clear and realistic approach, understanding student affairs professionals' scope, level of access, and professional expertise.

Consideration 2: Adopt practices to help students learn the General Education Objectives. The model institutions in this study believed that they had a role in helping students learn what the general education goals are and helping identify opportunities across campus that connect and contribute to them. For example, Institution 2 begins each major student affairs event or activity by stating the general education goals that are anticipated to be furthered by students engaging in said event. They consider this to be a relatively simple addition but one through which student affairs can help students build connections across varied learning opportunities and make implicit connections more explicit. Ambrose, Bridges, DiPietro, Lovett, and Norman (2010) found that "Goals provide students with a focus for their learning, which leads to more time and energy

going to that area of focus” (p. 128). This approach may also lead to some modifications of student affairs educational strategies in order to ensure that the programs and initiatives truly connect to the goals that are expressed.

Consideration 3: Clearly articulate the Division of Student Life areas of distinctive expertise in student learning and development. While each of the student affairs divisions from the model institutions demonstrated an alignment of their education efforts to general education goals, they also expressed a view that they played a unique and distinctive role in student learning that could not be accomplished by classroom learning alone. It was also articulated by the study participants that student affairs has highly distinctive contributions to student learning and student development that are not typically represented in general education goals. There are many important learning and student development domains that would not be accomplished with classroom approaches alone.

Consideration 4: Modify language used for learning outcomes specific to student affairs distinctiveness. Language of the student affairs was discussed by participants as an important consideration when attempting to establish a distinctive role in student learning. Speaking in the language of the academy was cited over and over as key by participants. Institution 2 displayed the strongest sentiment in this area and participants clearly felt that the language of the student affairs profession must change to match the language of the academy. Bresciani (2009) notes that many regional accreditors “have articulated clear and rigorous expectations that student support services document their contribution to student learning and development” (p. 528). Articulating student learning

and development goals in a clear and widely understood manner was identified as essential. Several authors (Bresciani et al., 2009; Borrego, 2006) discussed the tendency for insular jargon within the student affairs profession and those interviewed at model institutions emphatically expressed that outcomes, measures, and reports from student affairs must fit the broad institutional style for articulation of learning to be considered relevant.

Consideration 5: Develop strategies to connect the Division of Student Life practices and personnel with institutional efforts that focus on High Impact Practices (Kuh, 2008). Specifically, participants in this study discussed focusing on the following High Impact Practices: First-Year Seminars and Experiences, Learning Communities, Diversity/Global Learning, Service Learning and Community-Based Learning. This is a time of unique change at the University of Delaware relative to undergraduate learning. The new General Education Objectives have been approved by the Faculty Senate but the implementation strategies are in the process of being designed. Concurrently, the institution is undergoing a change process of the First Year Seminar. It appears to be an ideal time for the Division to advocate for roles in the various implementation and planning teams in order to maximize the potential for student learning through combined curricular and co-curricular efforts.

Recommendation 2: Invest in Personnel and Develop a Culture of Assessment

It is recommended that the Division of Student Life takes active steps to articulate assessment purpose, modify position descriptions and unit expectations, and invests significantly into staff development and the creation of assessment traditions.

Developing an organizational culture that embraces assessment was considered essential by participants from each of the three model institutions in this study (Finding 3). Schuh (2013) describes that “in a culture of assessment staff members recognize that they must collect evidence systematically to demonstrate accountability to stakeholders, and that they must use that evidence to improve” (p. 89). The importance of building a culture of assessment in student affairs is also strongly conveyed by other leading authors (Bentrim et al., 2015; Bingam, Bureau, & Duncan, 2015; Henning, & Roberts, 2016; Roper, 2015). These authors, as well as participants from the three institutions in this study, consistently express that developing quality assessment practices across the student affairs division is a complex, layered, and nuanced exercise. A participant from Institution 1 also added that to engage in the process of building a culture of evidence requires commitment “for the long haul” (VPSA). Three major areas of consideration are discussed in Finding 3: philosophy about the purpose and role of assessment; organizational infrastructure and resources; and strategies to sustain and enhance practices.

Consideration 1: Develop a Division of Student Life assessment philosophy focused on improvement, learning, and broad participation. Bresciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004) noted that “through assessment, one can create a culture of continuous

improvement” (p. 18). The directors of assessment units in student affairs at each model institution expressed strongly the view that the primary purpose of assessment in the student affairs division is improvement. Efforts were made to ensure that units did not view engagement in assessment practices as potential for judgement or a punitive response, although a candid review was expected and evidence of future improvement needed to be established (Finding 3). Participants expressed a sense of high value in the process of learning from assessment, even when that learning demonstrated deficiencies. Another consistent key assertion was that all units within student affairs were expected to participate and invest in assessment priorities. According to Banta (2004), “effective implementation of assessment...involves recognition that assessment is essential to learning, and therefore is everyone’s responsibility” (p. 4). Many student affairs professionals may be fearful of the implications of engaging in sincere and candid assessment work. It will be important for the Division of Student Life leadership to clearly express and demonstrate an improvement-oriented assessment philosophy and a value of discovery.

Consideration 2: Build necessary infrastructure and anchoring systems. Bentrin et al. (2015) found that “Building an infrastructure to support assessment efforts is one of the most critical components of sustaining a culture of assessment” (p. 27). Policies, allocation of fiscal and human resources, investment in personnel, and formulation of practices “provide the scaffolding that supports assessment efforts” (p. 27). Allocation of human resources was considered essential (Finding 4). Specifically, dedicating one full time professional to leading student affairs assessment efforts is recommended. The three

model institutions in this study spoke to the tremendous value of having such a person in a key leadership position. While that position was viewed essential, it was also asserted that this individual must have dedicated support from units within the student affairs division. It is recommended that each unit designates at least one key leader as the unit assessment coordinator and divisional liaison. Representatives from Institution 1 expressed that even after they built an assessment unit for student affairs, having a dedicated team of assessment champions across the student affairs units was crucial to the process of building and sustaining a culture of assessment within the division. Finally, each of the senior leaders interviewed in this study addressed the importance of connecting high quality assessment, specifically assessment for improvement, with resource allocations.

Consideration 3: Establish long-term, sustainable, and improvement-oriented practices. Specifically, it is recommended to focus on staff development and training, annual reinforcements, and senior leadership involvement. According to Bentrim et al. (2015), “Often, student affairs staff members don’t believe they have the skills or knowledge to perform assessment” (p. 13). The Division will need to invest significantly in conceptual and technical staff training and development in student learning and assessment. Such training could also serve to improve educational strategies in existing areas of student affairs expertise with a focus on learning outcomes and outcome measures. As noted in Finding 3, each model institution in this study found that their student affairs assessment unit needed to play a leading role in advancing the knowledge, skills, and competencies in assessment among student affairs professional staff. A

Scholar Practitioner mindset (Hatfield, & Wise, 2015) is recommended as a foundation to the staff development approach. This approach will provide the Division of Student Life professionals with not only the language of the academy but also a deeper understanding of their own practices and the opportunity to empirically examine assumptions about student gains.

Annual reinforcements have the capacity to sustain a culture of assessment. Elements that sustain a culture of assessment, as discussed in Finding 4, include: annual assessment plans, annual assessment reports, recognition strategies, broad sharing of findings, and celebration of successes. For instance, the bi-annual Division-wide business meetings could reinforce student learning and assessment priorities with simple modifications charging each unit to design a poster-fair display of their annual assessment findings. Recognition and reward structures could be modified to feature unit and individual accomplishments. Units that actively take steps to minimize inter-department silos and create multi-unit education strategies toward common outcomes could achieve further recognition and resource allocation. Participants from the model institutions concur that cultural change and reinforcement must be multi-faceted, continuous, and multi-dimensional. It is also important to formalize Division of Student Life culture of assessment success indicators. The necessity and importance of cultural norms and values were not only expressed by almost every participant, but emphatically so. Documenting and developing narratives to describe the foundational philosophies, key shared terminology, and expectations will be important steps. A Culture of Assessment Success Indicator Rubric (Appendix M) has been developed by Residence

Life and Housing. It is informed by best practices cited through this study, and it provides a sample of the considerations and decisions that should to be considered to create a vision, common language, success measures, and reinforcing systems.

Cultures develop organically, but are also led. Establishing healthy, sustaining, and self-perpetuating cultural systems and structures focused on new paradigms and approaches will require guidance and frameworks. The Division of Student Life at the University of Delaware is uniquely positioned in that the division reports to the Provost, the chief academic officer of the institution. Many institutions position Student Affairs units under administrative or auxiliary branches. The fact that University of Delaware is structured in this fashion should be capitalized on in a manner to more fully identify connections between in-classroom and outside-the-classroom student learning.

A high level of sensitivity about the primacy of the faculty role in directing educational outcomes was a common trend amongst the institutional representatives interviewed for this project. This high level of sensitivity is to be expected at the University of Delaware as well. Student affairs leaders from each of the three model institutions consistently discussed the essential need for executive level support and leadership in order for them to focus energies on general education. Several indicated that without such, they would not be able to commit to student learning and assessment. In order for the Division of Student Life to more fully enter the arena of student learning and assessment of such efforts, as represented in accreditation reports, Provost and Vice President of Student Life support would be essential. Should the Provost and Vice President of Student Life develop an interest in the Division of Student Life making

assessable and reportable contributions to the annual accreditation cycle, Division units could move forward with the confidence that they are acting on behalf of institutional aims and begin modifying practices and assessment efforts toward enhancing General Education Objectives as put forward by the Faculty Senate as well as their own areas of distinctiveness.

Recommendation 3: Foster Collaborative Efforts and Interdependency

It is recommended that the Division of Student Life takes active steps to create mutually beneficial collaborations and interdependencies based on common goals.

It is recommended that the Division of Student Life connects with four key entities at the University of Delaware in an effort to build collaboration in assessment efforts toward achieving institutional effectiveness aims. These entities include the Center for Teaching and Assessment of Learning (CTAL), the Faculty Senate Committee on General Education, the Undergraduate Studies Committee of the Faculty Senate, and the Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness. Wehlburg (2008) discusses that “Although there may be some ways that collaboration between academic and student affairs staff happens ‘by accident,’ in most cases it must be overtly planned for” (p. 92).

Consideration 1: Develop joint strategies toward measuring and improving student learning with the Center for Teaching and Assessment of Learning (CTAL). The 2010 University of Delaware Middle States self-study report explicitly called for a coordinated effort between the Division of Student Life and the Center for Teaching and Assessment of Learning (formerly the Office of Educational Assessment). Each of the

model institutions addressed similar key partnerships, none more so than Institution 3 whose deep collaborative efforts with its own version of CTAL and institutional research were shown to have strong mutually beneficial results (Finding 6).

Consideration 2: Identify opportunities for collaboration on assessment projects and joint studies. University of Delaware Office of Institutional Research and Effectiveness personnel often express concerns that our students are over-surveyed and thus less willing to take part in the efforts to examine their experience. For example, Institutional Research (IR) may be examining student engagement from the National Survey of Student Engagement framework. Residence Life & Housing and University Student Centers may be exploring the same set of constructs utilizing different measures and separate data warehouses. Institutional Research and Effectiveness may be examining student perspectives related to campus climate and diversity. The Center for Black Culture, the Center for the Study of Diversity, Residence Life & Housing, and Student Services for Athletes may be attempting to accomplish the same but via different approaches and measures. It is envisioned that by more fully networking with key student learning assessment entities and creating annual assessment plans to complement and enhance each unit's efforts, that our over-sampling problem could be alleviated. More importantly, joint efforts lead toward broadly shared goals and increased connection in the examination of results and improvement plans. For example, the head of the student affairs assessment unit in Institution 3 expressed that personnel commonly refer to the unit as a "mini IR" (Finding 6), and the head of educational assessment from

the same institution shared a sentiment that student affairs efforts would not be understood in absence of the close collaborative relationship on assessment.

Consideration 3: Develop strategies to populate the UD Data Warehouse with pertinent out-of-class factors. Institutional Research and Effectiveness relies heavily on data warehouses that are populated by inputs from UDSIS and Admissions data. The only items related to the Division of Student Life that could be extrapolated for analysis are whether a student is in a Greek organization, lived in a residence hall, is a Resident Assistant, was fined for a conduct infraction, or has been employed on campus in one of the units. Findings from all three institutions in this study assert the importance of developing connections in data sets. Institution 3 spoke about the difference the use of data dashboards, which connect and communicate with institutional data sets, made in guiding strategic plans and improving practices. Simple changes by each unit to input data into acceptable UDSIS formats would allow both Institutional Research and Effectiveness and the Division of Student Life to examine points of high impact. It is unknown if there is any relationship to items such as retention, persistence, and student success, not only for singular experiences offered through the Division, but through the cumulative effect of Division of Student Life unit-specific combinations. Examples of such combinations include: whether mentoring in the Center for Black Culture “Each One Reach One” program has impact on retention in major, time to graduation, or dozens of other tracked items; whether a student who utilized the Career Services Center and took part in mentoring had a higher GPA; or, whether a student lived on campus, was a member of a Registered Student Organization, and took part in the Blue Hen Leadership

Program is more likely to graduate in four years. Tracking such activities in a manner that allowed for broad data sharing was cited as highly important by the model institutions in this study.

Consideration 4: Develop strategic and mutually beneficial assessment relationships with academic units and centers. A recent collaboration between Residence Life & Housing and the Center for the Study of Diversity demonstrates the potential for mutual gains. Residence Life & Housing is highly interested in helping students from underrepresented populations find a sense of belonging in the residence halls and on campus. In addition, the unit is interested in helping students navigate and learn from difference. This unit lacks the formal academic discipline-level expertise to engage in such measures effectively. The Center for the Study of Diversity has well vetted scales and has consulted with the unit on both survey designs and educational strategy. In return, the Center is able to access the responses in these areas benefitting from the high (over 5000) response rate of Residence Life & Housing surveys and the broad demographics that cannot traditionally be obtained by faculty. The display of mutual interests on common goals also opens the door to numerous other collaborative opportunities in areas of mutual aims. Such collaborations on mutual goals exist in other parts of the academy. For instance, Hotel Restaurant and Institutional Management requires community service hours. The units in the Division of Student Life sponsor many service opportunities and often struggle for participants. The Division hires numerous national figures and leaders to speak on campus. Many would seamlessly complement the First Year Seminar and some specific academic discipline goals. In the

findings, Institution 2 participants discussed surprise by the academic units that student affairs had interest or capacity to provide complementary student learning experiences and the same may be true at the University of Delaware.

Model institutions had unique approaches in the area of collaboration and interweaving efforts. One student affairs leader (Institution 1) allocated a full-time student affairs staff member to support each college under the condition that this person was physically placed in the college Dean's suite. Proximity led to natural connections. The view that collaboration and interconnectedness between academic affairs and student affairs are of key importance is often cited in literature (AAHE, ACPA, & NASPA, 1998; Barr et al., 2014; Bresciani et al., 2009; Bresciani et al., 2004; Schuh, & Gansemer-Topf, 2010; Shivers, & McMillan, 2013; Wehlburg, 2008) and was also frequently expressed in conversations with leaders in the model institutions in this study.

Recommendation 4: Establish Practices that Demonstrate Transparency

It is recommended that the Division of Student Life develops a strong philosophy and practice of transparent assessment practices.

Jankowski and Cain (2015) discuss that "Seen as communication and enablement of action, transparency moves from simple compliance and a willingness to make information available to placing information relevant to student learning and success in the hands of the audiences who need and can use it" (p. 202). The experts from the model institutions in this study strongly assert that transparency is a critical aspect of a high quality assessment effort. The discussions surrounding transparency go beyond making

ones information discoverable to making the aims of assessment efforts and assessment findings part of a broader stakeholder conversation. A philosophy and practice of transparency offer numerous opportunities to the Division of Student Life.

Consideration 1: Consider creative approaches, such as the model developed by the annual “Blue Hen Poll” to engage the campus community in conversations about indicators relevant to the college student experience. Undergraduate students from course teams, under the instruction of Dr. David C. Wilson of the UD Department of Political Science and International Relations, helped to facilitate a rich dialogue. The Blue Hen Poll utilized press releases regarding assessment topics, data release events and forums, and social media posts. The Blue Hen Poll also maintained a web-page with data points and analysis broken down by topical areas for press and other interested parties. The Blue Hen Poll approach has demonstrated not only a capacity to generate information for the pollsters, but a means to stimulate campus conversations on numerous topics. The Poll has taken strong strategic steps to ensure that the student researcher and the student participant contributions do not sit on a shelf with a small reading audience. The Division of Student Life is encouraged to consider this successful home-based model as a pathway. The model institutions in this study encouraged utilizing assessment to engage in a dialogue with students. Institution 1 asked students to assist with interpreting the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE) findings and with proposing improvements. Institution 3 developed a social media approach to creatively disseminating assessment data to campus constituents to inspire curiosity and initiate dialogue.

Consideration 2: Develop means to invite the broad campus community into assessment related conversations. Should the Division succeed in developing a culture of assessment within its units, many potential assessment topics exist that have potential for engaging the larger campus stakeholder groups. For example, does early engagement in Career Services counseling lead to retention within major? Does involvement in a culturally based Registered Student Organization contribute to persistence? Is there a relationship between on-campus living and diversity competencies? Do three or four different data points of student engagement activities combine in a manner that contributes to student success? Because the Division of Student Life units cover a full spectrum of the student experience, the potential study questions are endless and many topics have the potential to bring a broad array of stakeholders into the discussion. Whether the topics are focused on areas of student affairs distinctiveness or connected to General Education Objectives, a highly transparent approach to areas of interest and study may lead to many unanticipated and fruitful collaborations on common aims. Institution 1, over several years, presented student engagement findings to as broad of an audience as possible, which eventually led to a discovery of curricular and co-curricular common interests and investments. Institution 2 representatives spoke with enthusiasm about the doors that opened through their philosophy of transparency and data integration.

Recommendation 5: Infuse Technology to Maximize Assessment Efforts

It is recommended that the Division of Student Life invest in technological hardware and software advances to enhance data gathering and analysis efforts.

The private sector has invested heavily in what is often referred to as “Big Data” in efforts to analyze multiple data points to understand the end user needs and wants. It is not recommended to engage in practices to capture every data point of every student. However, the use of more advanced technological approaches can further the Division’s efforts to gather and connect useful information to assess and improve student learning in areas of interest to accreditation and areas of unique interest to the Division of Student Life. Beyond gathering evidence of student learning, effective use of technology may also serve as a means to contribute to student learning.

Consideration 1: The Division is encouraged to invest in software and hardware platforms that provide avenues for student feedback at the moment of engagement. Swipe card capacities now exist for most mobile devices allowing for student feedback and engagement at the moment or immediately in the aftermath of educational activities. Institution 2 and Institution 3 participants discussed extensively the benefit of data capture through such technology (Finding 5). Furthermore, the items selected for assessment may offer educational value themselves based on the topics of reflection. Institution 2 and Institution 3 each shared examples of the utilization of technology to present their students with reflection opportunities about student engagement outside the classroom. John Dewey’s (1933) famous quote “We do not learn from experience... we learn from reflecting on experience” (p. 78) is instructive here. For instance, Cultural

Programming Advisory Board student leaders could canvas the room with portable electronic devices to engage audience members with questions about the impact of Melissa Harris Perry's (major campus speaker in 2015) speech on such topics as the role of media in race discussions. The questions could provide opportunities to gather input on General Education Objectives related to diversity or perspective taking but could also reinforce salient points of the presentation through reflection. Many such opportunities exist through the hundreds of activities and events facilitated through the Division, but a platform would need to be created to appropriately gather the information and feed it to a software platform that serves the interests of those developing accreditation reports and those in the Division focused on exploring program specific learning gains.

Consideration 2. Build data platforms and common data sets that are accessible to other assessment units. Many Division of Student Life units gather data and have done so for years. However, the data gathering has no standards for uniformity or information sharing and exchange. The units gather data and keep the knowledge gains in-house. Academic Integrity seminar responses reside in the Office of Student Conduct. The student involvement, engagement, and student satisfaction rates offered by 7000 participants annually reside in Residence Life & Housing. Center for Teaching and Assessment of Learning (CTAL) studies reside in CTAL. Institutional Research holds its own data sets. The model institutions in this study asserted a high need to focus on establishing common language with academic sectors, and then moved to developing data sets that capitalized on shared language with shared student learning results.

Should the Division elect to generate assessment results in a manner that contributes to accreditation goals and take part in the overall institutional improvement goals, an accessible platform to share results of data gathering and reporting would need to be developed. The encouragement for the Division to commit to UDSIS entries has been noted earlier, but this recommendation advances this theme through the creation of a distinctive Division of Student Life data warehouse hosting a library of both raw data and results of studies in a fashion that other researchers could benefit. Practices that effectively link data points on the student experience and that allow for information integration were not only supported by the three model institutions in this study, but they were viewed as essential.

Recommendation 6: Build Capacity for Division of Student Life to Make Direct Contributions in Periodic Review Cycles

It is recommended that the Division of Student Life leaders invest in efforts to tangibly contribute to the Periodic Review Report of 2016 and the Self Study Evaluation 2021 report.

National trends and emerging federal policy movements indicate a pressing need to formally capture student learning gains in both classroom and outside the classroom learning environments. Awaiting the call for contributions six months to a year in advance of reports does not afford enough time to shift educational or assessment of learning practices in a manner that contributes to accreditation findings beyond anecdotal results. Such approach is also counterproductive to ongoing improvement efforts as well

as accountability process expectations. Model institutions in this study reinforced this (Finding 4) and indicated that the best way to be prepared for periodic review processes was to be continually engaging in student learning assessment processes. Steps can be made at present time by the Division of Student Life to forecast items of interest for accreditation reports and begin establishing a means to contribute to student learning in an assessable fashion. A portion of this study included a detailed examination of each model-institution's accreditation reports and identifying the contributions by student affairs units. Subjects were asked specifically about how they arrived at a point to making such contributions and their responses serve as a basis for the considerations for this recommendation.

Consideration 1: In order to play a future role in the periodic review process, the Division of Student Life is encouraged to broadly join the current institutional conversations on accreditation reporting. In order for a more direct role to occur, as demonstrated by the three model institutions in Finding 4, groundwork could be laid at present time, well in advance of the 2021 review. Taking immediate steps to engage each of the Division of Student Life unit leaders in the Periodic Review process could provide valuable exposure and direction to the units even in absence of immediate measureable contributions to the eventual report. Such exposure at present time could prove to be helpful in an effort to transition the ways that units define and explore student learning success measures and help establish benchmarks toward 2021. Participants in Institution 2 and Institution 3 reflected that it was important for them to know how their university defined institutional effectiveness. It is also suggested that the Division of Student Life

examine every opportunity to place a member on every available Periodic Review Report writing team and eventual Self Study group. Such accomplishment were found to be of high impact by the model institutions, specifically Institution 1 and Institution 2. In interviews with the University of Delaware Provost and the Vice President of Student Life at the time of this study, the challenges from the 2010 accreditation review were discussed. Both spoke about opportunities for the future in order for the Division of Student Life to move beyond a minor subchapter of the accreditation report, as was the case in 2010, and toward being accurately and comprehensively featured in such institutional documents for contributions to the holistic student experience. Completing a gap analysis of institutional documents, and the past accreditation report, to identify areas of missed opportunities could be instructive for the Division.

Consideration 2: Demonstrate a role in measurable contributions in absence of an invitation. The Division of Student Life produces a wide array of student learning efforts and initiatives. Many already connect to General Education Objectives and some have immediate programmatic structural integrity to offer empirical evidence of learning outcome attainment. Although student learning gain reports have not been requested by entities such as Institutional Research and Effectiveness or the Office of the Provost, a degree of collegiality exists at University of Delaware where such reports have a chance of being well-received. The model institutions described an evolutionary process wherein student affairs out-of-class student learning moved from unconsidered to an important component of the broader educational landscape by way of persistence (and in some cases pestering). The participant in charge of student affairs assessment in Institution 3

reflected on sharing assessment reports relentlessly with institutional leadership, which led to student affairs being well represented in the overall accreditation report and a gained level of recognition and respect for the student affairs work. The key factor is in demonstrating capacity and establishing credibility. It will be important to move from being asked “do you have anything to contribute?” (a reflection on the past by a participant in Institution 2; Finding 4) to a role that is considered automatic and essential to overall campus review in describing campus effectiveness. The initiative to demonstrate student learning gains in a manner that could be understood by a broader campus audience was taken by student affairs, but over time, their efforts afforded their institutions to make the totality of the college experience more visible, and thus more open to improvement strategies. The model institutions’ approaches to effectively warehouse student learning assessment and make reports broadly accessible led to their reports being available and ready for a time when they were needed, in particular during periodic review cycles. The Division of Student Life may wish to consider such long-range approaches utilized by student affairs divisions from model institutions so that when Institutional Research is ready to document student learning for the purpose of accreditation, the University of Delaware will have an exceptional resource readily available.

Conclusion

These recommendations are respectfully submitted by a member of the Division of Student Life with the belief that Division units contribute much to the student learning process, and that each unit could improve practices related to their mission by more fully aligning with broad institutional aims. The lack of measureable contributions and a culture of student learning assessment serve to make the division and its affiliated units vulnerable to return on investment criticisms in the future. More importantly, there is tremendous opportunity inherent through identifying clear student learning aspirations and developing measures of progress that lead to educational gains for our students.

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APPENDICES

Appendix A Interview Participant Letter

Date

Dear Participant:

I am a doctoral candidate in the School of Education at the University of Delaware pursuing an Ed.D. in Educational Leadership with concentration in Curriculum, Technology, and Higher Education. I have also been professionally affiliated with the University of Delaware community for the past eight years. I am contacting you to request an interview as part of a study toward the completion of my Executive Position Paper titled *Contributions to Student Learning: Aligning Student Affairs Assessment with Institutional Accreditation Improvement Goals*.

Your institution was identified as a University progressing on successful assessment of student affairs contributions to student learning in the out-of-classroom domain. I am hoping to be able to gain an insight into the approaches of your division or institution to help guide the recommendations for my study.

In 2010, the University of Delaware completed the self-study process as part of the requirements for Middle States accreditation. Two recommendations specific to Student Life were articulated and the challenges to meet the recommendations are the focus of this project. The goals of this study are to (A) identify existing and potential measurable contributions of the University of Delaware Division of Student Life to the institutional general education goals, (B) provide the Division of Student Life leadership with recommended strategies to more closely align assessment efforts with the accreditation continuous improvement cycle of goal setting, assessment of student learning, and utilization of findings to make decisions about programmatic initiative improvements, and (C) help the Division of Student Life become a model within Middle States for demonstrating measurable contributions to out-of-class learning that are directly connected to institutional priorities for undergraduate education.

The study, including all interview questions and study protocols, was approved by the University of Delaware Human Subjects Committee of the Institutional Review Board. There are no foreseeable risks in participating in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life. Your participation in this project is voluntary, but your perspective on this topic will be invaluable to the study. I would be happy to answer any questions you may have about this project.

Thank you very much for your time and consideration. Your assistance in this project is greatly appreciated. Please let me know if I may contact you or your office representative in order to schedule an interview time.

Sincerely,

Iveta Ziegelbauer

Appendix B

Informed Consent Form

Title of Executive Position Paper: *Contributions to Student Learning: Aligning Student Affairs Assessment with Institutional Accreditation Improvement Goals*

Principal Investigator: Ms. Iveta Ziegelbauer
302-831-2815
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Advisor: Dr. Michael Middaugh
302-831-2021
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Purpose of the Study: The goals of this project are to (A) identify existing and potential measurable contributions of the University of Delaware Division of Student Life to the institutional general education goals, (B) provide the Division of Student Life leadership with recommended strategies to more closely align assessment efforts with the accreditation continuous improvement cycle of goal setting, assessment of student learning, and utilization of findings to make decisions about programmatic initiative improvements, and (C) help the Division of Student Life become a model within Middle States for demonstrating measurable contributions to out-of-class learning that are directly connected to institutional priorities for undergraduate education. A portion of the study includes exploring best practices of other institutions that may be of assistance to the Division of Student Life at the University of Delaware.

Procedures: You will be asked to participate in an interview about your perspective on the subject of the study. Participation is sought from University of Delaware representatives, and 2-3 representatives from each of the 3 benchmark institutions identified for the study. It is anticipated that it will take approximately 60 minutes to complete the interview. In addition to the interview, it may be necessary to contact you with follow up questions.

Voluntary Participation: You do not have to participate in this study. You can end your participation at any time by telling the principal investigator. If you terminate your participation in the study, any electronic records will be deleted and transcripts will be shredded immediately. You do not have to answer any question you do not wish to answer. You will be given a copy of this consent form to keep for your records.

Confidentiality: All information will be confidential. Your name and/or title will not be utilized in the study report. Benchmark institutions will be referred to as Institution 1, 2, and 3. Your name will be replaced with a code number for all research records to maintain confidentiality and all data will be secured on a password protected computer network.

Right to Ask Questions: You can ask the principal investigator and/or academic advisor questions about the study at any time (contact information is listed at the top of this consent form). If you have any concerns about the manner or conduct of the research, you may contact the Chair of the Human Subjects Review Board by mail at 210 Hulihan Hall, University of Delaware, Newark, Delaware 19716-1551, or by telephone at 302-831-2317.

Risks and Benefits: There are no foreseeable risks or benefits in participating in this study beyond those experienced in everyday life.

I have read and understand the above description, and I voluntarily agree to participate in the study "Contributions to Student Learning: Aligning Student Affairs Assessment with Institutional Accreditation Improvement Goals."

Participant Name

Participant Signature

Date

Permission to Audio Record: The interview will be audio recorded with your permission. The digital audio recording will be kept in a password protected file and only accessible to the principal investigator. Recordings will be transcribed and coded for common themes and recommendations. Digital recordings will be destroyed following transcription.

I agree to have the interview audio recorded _____
(Signature)

I do not agree to have the interview audio recorded _____
(Signature)

Appendix C

Document Review Rubric External Institution Review

Title of Document:

Source:

Institution:

1. Expression of student affairs outcomes

0 Not Expressed	1 Expressed in un-measureable terms	2 Expressed in difficult to measure terms	3 Expressed in generally measurable terms	4 Expressed in clearly measureable terms
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Comments/Listing of Specifics:

2. Evidence of student affairs outcomes measures

0 No Evidence	1 Vague Indicators	2 General Indicators	3 Solid Indicators	4 Substantial Indicators
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Comments/Listing of Specifics:

3. Evidence of general education outcomes measures

0 No Evidence	1 Vague Indicators	2 General Indicators	3 Solid Indicators	4 Substantial Indicators
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Comments/Listing of Specifics:

4. Evidence that student affairs outcome measures connect to institutional general education goals

0 No Evidence	1 Vague Indicators	2 General Indicators	3 Solid Indicators	4 Substantial Indicators
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Comments/Listing of Specifics:

5. Evidence that student affairs outcomes contribute to institutional accreditation reports

0 No Evidence	1 Vague Indicators	2 General Indicators	3 Solid Indicators	4 Substantial Indicators
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Comments/Listing of Specifics:

6. Evidence that student affairs assessment is utilized for planning purposes

0 No Evidence	1 Vague Indicators	2 General Indicators	3 Solid Indicators	4 Substantial Indicators
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Comments/Listing of Specifics:

7. Evidence that individual units within the division of student affairs connect to student affairs goals, relevant to general education.

0 No Evidence	1 Vague Indicators	2 General Indicators	3 Solid Indicators	4 Substantial Indicators
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Comments/Listing of Specifics:

8. Evidence of specific measurable contributions

0 No Evidence	1 Vague Indicators	2 General Indicators	3 Solid Indicators	4 Substantial Indicators
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Comments/Listing of Specifics:

Appendix D

Interview Questions

1. Introduction – purpose of the study
2. Informed Consent Form – sent by e-mail
3. Handout with relevant discussion information provided to participants prior to interview – project title, goals of the project, Middle States self-study recommendations for Student Life at the University of Delaware
4. Interview Questions:
 - A. How does your institution define general education?
 - B. Could you describe the approach to assessment of general education at your institution?
 - C. Are both classroom and out-of-classroom units expected to make contributions to student attainment of general education?
 - D. What specific measures are utilized to assess student attainment of general education competencies?
 - E. From your perspective, how important is it for student affairs units to contribute to general education of students?
 - i. What do you believe are the current contributions?
 - ii. How are any existing contributions assessed and reported?
 - F. To what degree are student affairs units on your campus familiar with accreditation requirements?
 - G. How is assessment coordinated on your campus to reduce duplication and maximize collaboration among units?
 - H. Are there any institutional reports or web pages you would recommend that I examine as I work on this study?

Appendix E

Middle States Commission on Higher Education Standards for Accreditation

Institutional Context

Standard 1: Mission and Goals

The institution's mission clearly defines its purpose within the context of higher education and indicates who the institution serves and what it intends to accomplish. The institution's stated goals, consistent with the aspirations and expectations of higher education, clearly specify how the institution will fulfill its mission. The mission and goals are developed and recognized by the institution with the participation of its members and its governing body and are used to develop and shape its programs and practices and to evaluate its effectiveness.

Standard 2: Planning, Resource Allocation, and Institutional Renewal

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

Standard 3: Institutional Resources

The human, financial, technical, physical facilities, and other resources necessary to achieve an institution's mission and goals are available and accessible. In the context of the institution's mission, the effective and efficient uses of the institution's resources are analyzed as part of ongoing outcomes assessment.

Standard 4: Leadership and Governance

The institution's system of governance clearly defines the roles of institutional constituencies in policy development and decision-making. The governance structure includes an active governing body with sufficient autonomy to assure institutional integrity and to fulfill its responsibilities of policy and resource development, consistent with the mission of the institution.

Standard 5: Administration

The institution's administrative structure and services facilitate learning and research/scholarship, foster quality improvement, and support the institution's organization and governance.

Standard 6: Integrity

In the conduct of its programs and activities involving the public and the constituencies it serves, the institution demonstrates adherence to ethical standards and its own stated policies, providing support for academic and intellectual freedom.

Standard 7: Institutional Assessment

The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals and its compliance with accreditation standards.

*Educational Effectiveness***Standard 8: Student Admissions and Retention**

The institution seeks to admit students whose interests, goals, and abilities are congruent with its mission and seeks to retain them through the pursuit of the students' educational goals.

Standard 9: Student Support Services

The institution provides student support services reasonably necessary to enable each student to achieve the institution's goals for students.

Standard 10: Faculty

The institution's instructional, research, and service programs are devised, developed, monitored, and supported by qualified professionals.

Standard 11: Educational Offerings

The institution's educational offerings display academic content, rigor, and coherence appropriate to its higher education mission. The institution identifies student learning goals and objectives, including knowledge and skills, for its educational offerings.

Standard 12: General Education

The institution's curricula are designed so that students acquire and demonstrate college-level proficiency in general education and essential skills, including at least oral and written communication, scientific and quantitative reasoning, critical analysis and reasoning, and technological competency.

Standard 13: Related Educational Activities

The institution's programs or activities that are characterized by particular content, focus, location, mode of delivery, or sponsorship meet appropriate standards.

Standard 14: Assessment of Student Learning

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

(Middle States Commission on Higher Education. Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation, 2006)

Appendix F

Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs (NASPA)

- 1. Good practice in student affairs engages students in active learning*

Active learning invites students to bring their life experiences into the learning process, reflect on their own and others' perspectives as they expand their viewpoints, and apply new understandings to their own lives. Good student affairs practice provides students with opportunities for experimentation through programs focused on engaging students in various learning experiences. These opportunities include experiential learning such as student government; collective decision making on educational issues; field-based learning such as internships; peer instruction; and structured group experiences such as community service, international study, and resident advising.
- 2. Good practice in student affairs helps students develop coherent values and ethical standards.*

Good student affairs practice provides opportunities for students, faculty, staff, and student affairs educators to demonstrate the values that define a learning community. Effective learning communities are committed to justice, honesty, equality, civility, freedom, dignity, and responsible citizenship. Such communities challenge students to develop meaningful values for a life of learning. Standards espoused by student affairs divisions should reflect the values that bind the campus community to its educational mission.
- 3. Good practice in student affairs sets and communicates high expectations for learning.*

Student learning is enhanced when expectations for student performance inside and outside the classroom are high, appropriate to students' abilities and aspirations, and consistent with the institution's mission and philosophy. Expectations should address the wide range of student behaviors associated with academic achievement, intellectual and psychosocial development, and individual and community responsibility. Good student affairs divisions systematically describe desired levels of performance to students as well as to practitioners and regularly assess whether their performances are consistent with institutional expectations.
- 4. Good practice in student affairs uses systematic inquiry to improve student and institutional performance.*

Good practice in student affairs occurs when student affairs educators ask, "What are students learning from our programs and services, and how can their learning be enhanced?" Knowledge of and ability to analyze research about students and their learning are critical components of good student affairs practice. Student affairs educators who are skilled in using assessment methods acquire high-quality information; effective application of this information to practice results in programs and change strategies which improve institutional and student achievement.

5. *Good practice in student affairs uses resources effectively to achieve institutional missions and goals.*
Effective student affairs divisions are responsible stewards of their institutions' financial and human resources. They use principles of organizational planning to create and improve learning environments throughout the campus that emphasize institutions' desired educational outcomes for students. Because the most important resources for learning are human resources, good student affairs divisions involve professionals who can translate into practice guiding theories and research from areas such as human development, learning and cognition, communication, leadership, and program design and implementation.
6. *Good practice in student affairs forges educational partnerships that advance student learning.*
Good student affairs practice initiates educational partnerships and develops structures that support collaboration. Partners for learning include students, faculty, academic administrators, staff, and others inside and outside the institution. Collaboration involves all aspects of the community in the development and implementation of institutional goals and reminds participants of their common commitment to students and their learning. Relationships forged across departments and divisions demonstrate a healthy institutional approach to learning by fostering inclusiveness, bringing multiple perspectives to bear on problems, and affirming shared educational values.
7. *Good practice in student affairs builds supportive and inclusive communities.*
Student learning occurs best in communities that value diversity, promote social responsibility, encourage discussion and debate, recognize accomplishments, and foster a sense of belonging among their members. Good student affairs practice cultivates supportive environments by encouraging connections between students, faculty, and student affairs practitioners. This interweaving of students' academic, interpersonal, and developmental experiences is a critical institutional role for student affairs.

(NASPA, Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education, 1998)

Principles of Good Practice Study Group Members:

- Greg Blimling, Co-Chair, Appalachian State University
- Elizabeth Whitt, Co-Chair, University of Iowa
- Marcia Baxter-Magolda, Miami University
- Arthur Chickering, Vermont College, Norwich University
- Johnetta Cross-Brazzell, Spelman College
- Jon Dalton, Florida State University
- Zelda Gamson, University of Massachusetts
- George Kuh, Indiana University
- Ernest Pascarella, University of Iowa
- Linda Reisser, Suffolk County Community College
- Larry Roper, Oregon State University
- Charles Schroeder, University of Missouri-Columbia

Appendix G

9 Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning (AAHE)

1. **The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.** Assessment is not an end in itself but a vehicle for educational improvement. Its effective practice, then, begins with and enacts a vision of the kinds of learning we most value for students and strive to help them achieve. Educational values should drive not only *what* we choose to assess but also *how* we do so. Where questions about educational mission and values are skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about.
2. **Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.** Learning is a complex process. It entails not only what students know but what they can do with what they know; it involves not only knowledge and abilities but values, attitudes, and habits of mind that affect both academic success and performance beyond the classroom. Assessment should reflect these understandings by employing a diverse array of methods, including those that call for actual performance, using them over time so as to reveal change, growth, and increasing degrees of integration. Such an approach aims for a more complete and accurate picture of learning, and therefore firmer bases for improving our students' educational experience.
3. **Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.** Assessment is a goal-oriented process. It entails comparing educational performance with educational purposes and expectations -- those derived from the institution's mission, from faculty intentions in program and course design, and from knowledge of students' own goals. Where program purposes lack specificity or agreement, assessment as a process pushes a campus toward clarity about where to aim and what standards to apply; assessment also prompts attention to where and how program goals will be taught and learned. Clear, shared, implementable goals are the cornerstone for assessment that is focused and useful.
4. **Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.** Information about outcomes is of high importance; where students "end up" matters greatly. But to improve outcomes, we need to know about student experience along the way -- about the curricula, teaching, and kind of student effort that lead to particular outcomes. Assessment can help us understand which students learn best under what conditions; with such knowledge comes the capacity to improve the whole of their learning.
5. **Assessment works best when it is ongoing not episodic.** Assessment is a process whose power is cumulative. Though isolated, "one-shot" assessment can be better than none, improvement is best fostered when assessment entails a linked series of activities undertaken over time. This may mean tracking the process of individual students, or of cohorts of students; it may mean collecting the same examples of student performance or using the same instrument semester after semester. The point is to monitor progress toward intended goals in a spirit of continuous improvement.

Along the way, the assessment process itself should be evaluated and refined in light of emerging insights.

6. **Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.** Student learning is a campus-wide responsibility, and assessment is a way of enacting that responsibility. Thus, while assessment efforts may start small, the aim over time is to involve people from across the educational community. Faculty play an especially important role, but assessment's questions can't be fully addressed without participation by student-affairs educators, librarians, administrators, and students. Assessment may also involve individuals from beyond the campus (alumni/ae, trustees, employers) whose experience can enrich the sense of appropriate aims and standards for learning. Thus understood, assessment is not a task for small groups of experts but a collaborative activity; its aim is wider, better-informed attention to student learning by all parties with a stake in its improvement.
7. **Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.** Assessment recognizes the value of information in the process of improvement. But to be useful, information must be connected to issues or questions that people really care about. This implies assessment approaches that produce evidence that relevant parties will find credible, suggestive, and applicable to decisions that need to be made. It means thinking in advance about how the information will be used, and by whom. The point of assessment is not to gather data and return "results"; it is a process that starts with the questions of decision-makers, that involves them in the gathering and interpreting of data, and that informs and helps guide continuous improvement.
8. **Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.** Assessment alone changes little. Its greatest contribution comes on campuses where the quality of teaching and learning is visibly valued and worked at. On such campuses, the push to improve educational performance is a visible and primary goal of leadership; improving the quality of undergraduate education is central to the institution's planning, budgeting, and personnel decisions. On such campuses, information about learning outcomes is seen as an integral part of decision making, and avidly sought.
9. **Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public.** There is a compelling public stake in education. As educators, we have a responsibility to the publics that support or depend on us to provide information about the ways in which our students meet goals and expectations. But that responsibility goes beyond the reporting of such information; our deeper obligation -- to ourselves, our students, and society -- is to improve. Those to whom educators are accountable have a corresponding obligation to support such attempts at improvement.

American Association for Higher Education (AAHE). (1996)

Authors: Alexander W. Astin; Trudy W. Banta; K. Patricia Cross; Elaine El-Khawas; Peter T. Ewell; Pat Hutchings; Theodore J. Marchese; Kay M. McClenney; Marcia Mentkowski; Margaret A. Miller; E. Thomas Moran; Barbara D. Wright

This document was developed under the auspices of the AAHE Assessment Forum (Barbara Cambridge is Director) with support from the Fund for the Improvement of Post-Secondary Education with additional support for publication and dissemination from the Exxon Education Foundation. Copies may be made without restriction. AAHE site maintained by: Mary C. Schwarz mjoyce@aahe.org

Appendix H

General Education at the University of Delaware

Purposes for the University of Delaware's General Education Program

We seek to prepare students who are:

- Engaged citizens, involved in the world around them, and who understand the major challenges and debates of the day;
- Aware of their intellectual strengths and interests and of their ethical values and commitments;
- Capable of interpreting the arts and culture of contemporary and past societies; and
- Equipped with the essential skills necessary to thrive in a rapidly evolving world including the ability to be a lifelong learner, creator, and innovator.

General Education Objectives

General education at the University of Delaware prepares students who are able to:

1. Read critically, analyze arguments and information, and engage in constructive ideation.
2. Communicate effectively in writing, orally, and through creative expression.
3. Work collaboratively and independently within and across a variety of cultural contexts and a spectrum of differences.
4. Critically evaluate the ethical implications of what they say and do.
5. Reason quantitatively, computationally, and scientifically.

Appendix I

University of Delaware Center for Teaching and Assessment of Learning

Mission

We facilitate and foster high quality teaching, learning, and assessment for the campus community of educators.

Vision

We envision a learner-centered university where everyone values learning, rewards high quality teaching, and constantly advances our understanding and practices of both.

Values

- We believe that teaching, learning, and assessment are inextricably linked.
- We believe that teaching is a skill that can be developed and informed by knowledge, research, and reflection.
- We believe that high quality teaching can be recognized and should be rewarded and celebrated.
- We believe that learning is the essential outcome and purpose of teaching.
- We believe that the best learning occurs when guided by educators who continually assess their students' and their own development, skills, and knowledge.
- We believe that the best learning occurs with engaged participants who bring and respect diverse perspectives.
- We believe that the university most effectively understands and improves teaching, learning, and assessment when experts with diverse interests and backgrounds collaborate.

Appendix J

University of Delaware

Mission Statement

The University of Delaware exists to cultivate learning, develop knowledge, and foster the free exchange of ideas. State-assisted yet privately governed, the University has a strong tradition of distinguished scholarship, research, teaching, and service that is grounded in a commitment to increasing and disseminating scientific, humanistic, and social knowledge for the benefit of the larger society. Founded in 1743 and chartered by the state in 1833, the University of Delaware today is a land-grant, sea-grant, and space-grant university.

The University of Delaware is a major research university with extensive graduate programs that is also dedicated to outstanding undergraduate and professional education. University faculty are committed to the intellectual, cultural, and ethical development of students as citizens, scholars, and professionals. University graduates are prepared to contribute to a global society that requires leaders with creativity, integrity, and a dedication to service.

The University of Delaware promotes an environment in which all people are inspired to learn, and encourages intellectual curiosity, critical thinking, free inquiry, and respect for the views and values of an increasingly diverse population.

An institution engaged in addressing the critical needs of the state, nation, and global community, the University of Delaware carries out its mission with the support of alumni who span the globe and in partnerships with public, private, and nonprofit institutions in Delaware and beyond.

Path to Prominence™

Guiding Principles: Core Values

To travel forward, we first needed to define where we stand. In discussions across the University community, we identified five guiding principles that represent our commitments to the world. These guiding principles serve as beacons to guide our progress forward.

Delaware First

Our first and most important commitment is to be the flagship of higher education for the State of Delaware – both by ensuring that every Delawarean has access to a top-quality education, and by applying the strengths and resources of the University to benefit the greater Delaware community. The rising prominence of the University of Delaware will bring new energy, opportunity, and recognition to the State of Delaware.

Diversity

The University of Delaware will foster a robust educational environment in which all people are welcome and feel welcome – one that supports critical thinking, free inquiry, and respect for diverse views and values. As a community, we will embrace diversity as an integral and vital part of everyday life and a cornerstone value of our University.

Partnership

The University of Delaware will create innovative partnerships for economic and community development, building knowledge and promoting ideas that serve the critical needs of the state, the nation, and the world.

Engagement

The University of Delaware will engage students, faculty, staff, and alumni in the most compelling social, cultural, artistic, and scientific challenges of our age. It will place itself among the world's leading universities by addressing such important matters as environmental sustainability, social justice, and alleviation of human suffering.

Impact

Our job is not done until our ideas, our expertise, and our students are given the opportunity to make a significant difference in the world. To succeed, we must assure that the University's innovation, excitement, and accomplishments are publicly known throughout Delaware, academia, and across the nation and the world.

Milestones:

A Diverse and Stimulating Undergraduate Academic Environment

A University of Delaware education will ensure that intellectual curiosity and a passion for learning become habits of mind.

The University of Delaware must attract students who bring brilliance, talent, life experiences, and diversity – ethnic, geographic, and socioeconomic – that are characteristic of great universities. A University of Delaware education will ensure that intellectual curiosity and a passion for learning become habits of mind. Our students must have opportunities for innovation, entrepreneurship, and creativity. We must also enrich our students beyond the classroom with shared experiences and traditions that bind them to the University and to each other and create pride in their alma mater.

Over the next decade, we will remain close to our current undergraduate enrollment, focusing on continuing improvement in student qualifications for success rather than on increasing student numbers. Incoming University of Delaware classes will become increasingly diverse – ethnically, culturally, regionally, internationally, and intellectually.

- Attract and Support Students from Delaware and Diverse Backgrounds
- Enhance Curriculum Flexibility, Intellectual Exploration, and Discovery Learning
- Create a Stimulating First-Year Experience
- Recruit and Develop Highly Talented Undergraduates

A Premier Research and Graduate University

Narrative omitted.

Excellence in Professional Education

Narrative omitted.

The Initiative for the Planet

In the opening decade of the 21st century, the constraints imposed by a common planet have come to the forefront. The University of Delaware, with a strong history of environmental research and education, is positioned to help lead the way in developing technological, social, political, and cultural solutions to these challenges. As a cornerstone of our commitment, we will undertake to become carbon-neutral.

The goals of this initiative are to promote sustainable practices and to support multidisciplinary efforts in research and education needed to develop solutions to significant, time-critical issues in energy, the environment, and resource sustainability. Our overarching objective is to make the University of Delaware a national and international resource for environmental research, technology, education, and policy – today and into the future.

- Lead Path-breaking Environmental Research
- Become “The Green University”
- Develop and Demonstrate Alternative Energy Technologies
- Integrate Environmental Programs Within the Curriculum

The Global Initiative

The University of Delaware must both prepare students to be contributing citizens of the world and serve as a “citizen university” in a global society. As a community, we will foster knowledge and awareness of the economic,

environmental, political, cultural, and social issues that face the world – and the skills to address them.

Our global initiative will embrace the diverse regions and people of the greater United States as well as countries and cultures around the world. Facilitating communication and collaboration, through language study, the use of technology, and sharing of the human experience is central to achieving understanding. Therefore, global experience, both on our campus and beyond, is critical to our success. We will leverage and increase our academic ties with leading institutions around the world, both in education and research.

- Establish the Institute for Global Studies
- Educate Engaged Global Citizens
- Extend Our Geographic Reach
- Develop Strategic and Active Global Partnerships

The Engaged University

Among the University of Delaware's greatest strengths is its long tradition of public service, as well as its excellence in the arts, humanities, and social sciences. As the largest university in a small yet nationally and internationally important state, we have the opportunity to work closely with public agencies throughout Delaware, applying research and human talent to address pressing social and civic issues. Our central location in the Northeast Corridor gives the University unparalleled access to major centers of government, commerce, and culture.

To fulfill the University's mission of education and service, we will become a university that values engagement, one that continues to build and promote dynamic programs of world-class distinction, reaching out to local and regional constituents – and far beyond – to address the challenges that face the world.

- Inspire an Engaged Student Body
- Promote Lifelong Engagement with Alumni
- Cultivate a Culturally and Socially Engaged University
- Engage the Community as an Impetus for Innovation
- Strengthen Public Education in Delaware and Beyond
- Partner with the City of Newark
- Increase the University's Presence and Engagement in Southern Delaware

Appendix K

University of Delaware Division of Student Life

Mission

The Division of Student Life supports the educational mission of the University through student advocacy, innovative services, and programs that promote student learning, personal development & well-being, and academic success. The Division fosters inclusive communities, facilitates student engagement and leadership development, and promotes responsible citizenship.

Values

- Student Success
- Diverse & Inclusive Communities
- Quality Service
- Innovative Practices
- Collaboration & Teamwork
- Integrity

Key Initiatives

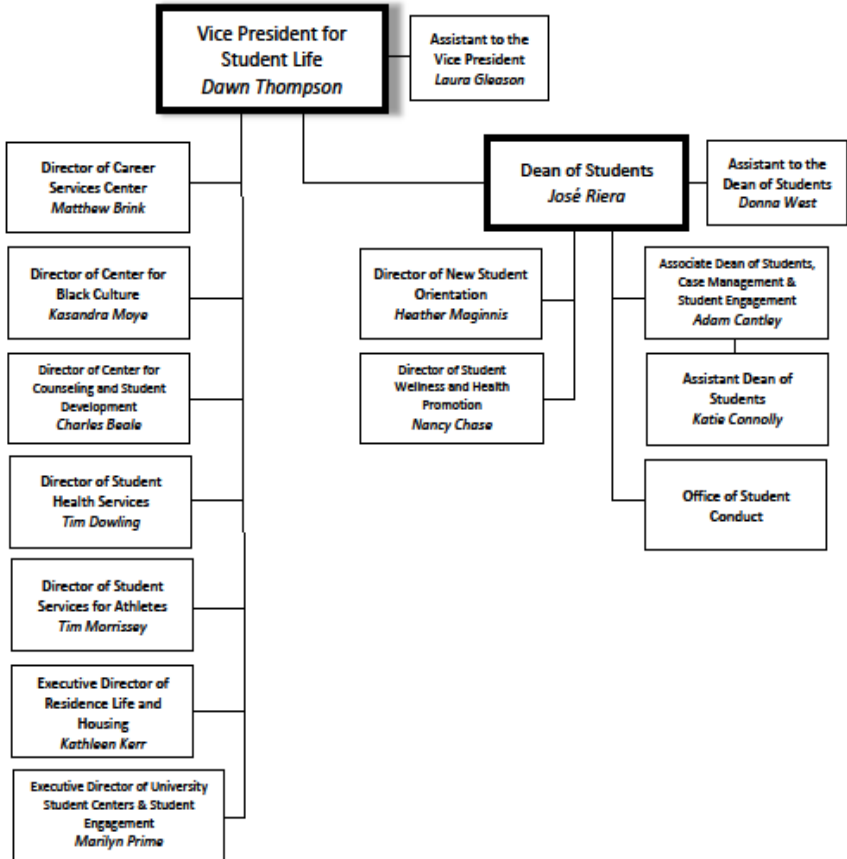
In pursuit of our mission and in support of the Path To Prominence (P2P) strategic plan of the University of Delaware, Student Life has identified 4 key strategic planning areas:

1. Promote greater student engagement in educationally purposeful programs and social activities, encourage greater student interaction with faculty, staff and peers, and provide students with shared experiences and traditions that bind them to the University and enrich their education.
2. Provide effective leadership and support with programs and services that foster a welcoming environment in alignment with the University's diversity statement.
3. Increase the quality and impact of Student Life programs and services.
4. Develop the First Year Experience Program (FYE) to provide students with an inclusive and seamless first year experience, integrate the social and academic dimensions of being a student at UD, and foster a successful transition to college.

Appendix L

University of Delaware Division of Student Life – Organizational Chart

University of Delaware Division of Student Life



September 2014

Appendix M

University of Delaware - Residence Life & Housing Culture of Assessment: Success Indicators

Category	Early Indicators	Mid-Point Indicators	Success Indicators
Use and application of Learning Outcomes	Many goals stated but not measurable; ineffectively constructed outcomes; strategies not mapped to outcomes/goals <input type="checkbox"/>	Well constructed outcomes, not fully connected/mapped to practices; outcomes viewed as a measurement rather than a starting point in design <input type="checkbox"/>	Learning outcomes are clear, measurable and adopted by the employees in the department. Learning outcomes drive the design process of educational strategies (they come first). Learning outcomes are aligned and easily connectable to broader institutional priorities. <input type="checkbox"/>
Department philosophy	Expresses importance of assessment to staff and has established some aspirations <input type="checkbox"/>	Challenges existing practices through use of data. Solid expectations that all staff analyze practices through quality assessment <input type="checkbox"/>	Scholar-practitioner mindset throughout the department; positive restlessness (always more to learn and apply; positive view of the learning process) <input type="checkbox"/>
Staffing and personnel	One person charged with leading efforts <input type="checkbox"/>	Standing departmental committee; expectations for department participation <input type="checkbox"/>	Assessment is part of many/most professional position descriptions in the department. One or two key department members with formal leadership roles in assessment. Assessment work is recognized in appraisal processes and recognition. <input type="checkbox"/>
Training and professional development	Single training session in fall; encouragement for independent learning <input type="checkbox"/>	Number of skilled department veterans who lead department efforts <input type="checkbox"/>	Training time is allocated during multiple points in the year; system in place to bring new members up to performance standard and to advance/grow skills of seasoned employees <input type="checkbox"/>
Department responsibilities	Few members of the unit create assessment reports for others to read <input type="checkbox"/>	Members are required to use assessable learning outcomes when designing initiatives and to report on outcomes <input type="checkbox"/>	Once or twice per year, every member of professional staff must analyze, report, and present to the department use and application of data connected to goals/outcomes <input type="checkbox"/>
Assessment plan	Two annual surveys <input type="checkbox"/>	A list of priorities are identified (calendar focus; logistics; not over-surveying) <input type="checkbox"/>	Comprehensive annual assessment plan is developed and distributed; assessment activities connect to one another <input type="checkbox"/>
Programmatic and educational strategies	Educational strategies are developed in a soloist/silo manner <input type="checkbox"/>	Some semester-long collaborations focused on an area of learning <input type="checkbox"/>	Strategies can be easily mapped to specific pre-established outcomes; strategies are connected and interwoven toward common educational aims <input type="checkbox"/>

Category	Early Indicators	Mid-Point Indicators	Success Indicators
Department decision making and budgeting	Funds can be requested for assessment efforts out of miscellaneous budget or surplus lines <input type="checkbox"/>	A line-item for assessment is on the budget statement <input type="checkbox"/>	Assessment is used to make informed decisions and resource allocations; high appreciation of data-driven approaches. Assessment is a priority on department budget (allocation of resources). <input type="checkbox"/>
Openness to all findings	Negative/low findings are attributed to bad assessment design <input type="checkbox"/>	Negative/low findings are not broadly shared, but are considered for improvement purposes <input type="checkbox"/>	Negative/low findings are viewed as an opportunity (rethink; drop and not continue based on faith; re-conceptualize), not a failure. Critique is viewed as welcome part of growth process. <input type="checkbox"/>
Ongoing practices	Assessment is something that must be faced once or twice a year <input type="checkbox"/>	Major all-department assessment efforts are given broad attention <input type="checkbox"/>	Assessment reports/updates are a routine part of staff meetings, design, and decision making processes <input type="checkbox"/>
Broadening impact	Assessment goals and results are shared with department members <input type="checkbox"/>	Assessment goals and results are shared with select audiences through reports and presentations <input type="checkbox"/>	Assessment is regularly shared back with participants; assessment reports are shared with broader institutional community for cross-departmental connections and ongoing improvement <input type="checkbox"/>
Writing and presenting	Scholarly articles are periodically routed and discussed in staff meetings <input type="checkbox"/>	Staff members are encouraged to write and present proposals and assessment reports with solid literature utilization to the department <input type="checkbox"/>	Writing, publishing, and sharing with the broader profession sharpens skills and improves practice. Such practices are recognized and rewarded <input type="checkbox"/>
Warehousing	Assessment reports are gathered and stored by supervisors <input type="checkbox"/>	Past year assessment reports on key initiatives are available upon request to appropriate personnel <input type="checkbox"/>	Assessment data and report archives are easily accessible to current and new employees. Protocols and resources are well established (all IRB certified; research ethics trained). Use consistent demographics and scales for data sets (yearly comparisons). <input type="checkbox"/>

Appendix N

Institutional Review Board Approval



RESEARCH OFFICE

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DATE: April 15, 2011

TO: Iveta Ziegelbauer
FROM: University of Delaware IRB

STUDY TITLE: [217967-1] Contributions to Student Learning: Aligning Student Affairs
Assessment with Institutional Accreditation Improvement Goals

SUBMISSION TYPE: New Project

ACTION: APPROVED
APPROVAL DATE: April 15, 2011
EXPIRATION DATE: April 14, 2012
REVIEW TYPE: Expedited Review

REVIEW CATEGORY: Expedited review category # 7

Thank you for your submission of New Project materials for this research study. The University of Delaware IRB has APPROVED your submission. This approval is based on an appropriate risk/benefit ratio and a study design wherein the risks have been minimized. All research must be conducted in accordance with this approved submission.

This submission has received Expedited Review based on the applicable federal regulation.

Please remember that informed consent is a process beginning with a description of the study and insurance of participant understanding followed by a signed consent form. Informed consent must continue throughout the study via a dialogue between the researcher and research participant. Federal regulations require each participant receive a copy of the signed consent document.

Please note that any revision to previously approved materials must be approved by this office prior to initiation. Please use the appropriate revision forms for this procedure.

All SERIOUS and UNEXPECTED adverse events must be reported to this office. Please use the appropriate adverse event forms for this procedure. All sponsor reporting requirements should also be followed.

Please report all NON-COMPLIANCE issues or COMPLAINTS regarding this study to this office.

Please note that all research records must be retained for a minimum of three years.

Based on the risks, this project requires Continuing Review by this office on an annual basis. Please use the appropriate renewal forms for this procedure.