An instrumental case study of the phenomenon of collaboration in the process of improving community college developmental reading and writing instruction

Patricia C. Gordin

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An Instrumental Case Study of the Phenomenon of Collaboration in the Process of Improving Community College Developmental Reading and Writing Instruction

by

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A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my husband, Larry Gordin, whose patience and unconditional support has propelled me through this program; to my boss, Maureen McClintock, who has shown me that a leader can also be a friend; and to my parents, Harold and Audrey Hayward, who invested in their children’s future by providing all three of them with a baccalaureate education.
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An Instrumental Case Study of the Phenomenon of Collaboration in the Process of Improving Community College Developmental Reading and Writing Instruction

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ABSTRACT

Focusing upon the intersections between community college faculty and assessment professionals (e.g., institutional researchers) in improving student learning outcomes, the purpose of this study was to describe, analyze, and interpret the experiences of these professionals as they planned for and conducted student learning outcomes assessment in developmental reading, writing, and study skills courses. This instrumental case study at one particular community college in Florida investigated the roles played by these individuals within the larger college effort to develop a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), an essential component of a regional accreditation review.

The methodology included individual interviews, a focus group interview, a field observation, and analysis of documents related to assessment planning. There were several major findings:

- Assessment professionals and faculty teaching developmental courses had similar professional development interests (e.g., teaching and learning, measurement).
- While some faculty leaders assumed a facilitative role similar to that of an assessment professional, the reporting structure determined the appropriate
action taken in response to the results of assessment. That is, assessment professionals interpreted results and recommended targets for improvement, while faculty and instructional administrators implemented and monitored instructional strategies.

- The continuous transformation of the QEP organizational structure through research, strategy formulation, and implementation phases in an inclusive process enabled the college to put its best knowledge and measurement expertise into its five-year plan.

- Developmental goals for students in addition to Florida-mandated exit exams included self-direction, affective development such as motivation, and success at the next level.

- Faculty identified discipline-based workshops as promising vehicles for infusing instructional changes into courses, thus using the results of learning outcomes assessments more effectively.

A chronological analysis further contributed to findings of the study. This researcher concluded that the College’s eight-year history of developing general education outcomes and striving to improve the college preparatory program through longitudinal tracking of student success had incubated a powerful faculty learning community and an alliance with assessment professionals. This community of practice, when provided the right structure, leadership, and resources, enabled the College to create a Quality Enhancement Plan that faculty and staff members could be proud of.
Chapter One

Introduction and Background

“Democracy arose from men thinking that if they are equal in any respect they are equal in all respects” (Aristotle, Politics, c.322 B.C., in Frost-Knappman & Shrager, 1998, p.90).

Over the years, assessment professionals at Sunshine State Community College (a fictitious name) have worked with faculty using an assortment of measurement tools to identify and target problems impeding the success of students in developmental reading and writing. This challenge has called upon the resources, commitment, and ingenuity of college faculty, administrators, and institutional research staff to examine evidence of student learning and work out new solutions to learning problems. The focus of this study is upon the interactions between faculty members and assessment professionals, such as institutional researchers at Sunshine State Community College, that lead to improvement. In combining their expertise within a student learning outcomes assessment process, these educators reexamine their long-held beliefs about effective teaching based upon evidence and subsequently reformulate learning strategies. In describing, analyzing, and interpreting these experiences, this case study describes aspects of the problem solving process undertaken by faculty and assessment professionals as they strive for student learning improvement in developmental reading and writing.
The Crisis in Developmental Education

According to George R. Boggs, President of the American Association of Community Colleges, the higher education institutions that educate almost half of all undergraduate students nation-wide are caught in a perfect storm of increasing enrollment and declining funding (2004). Although governments have realized the economic importance of an educated citizenry to their states, they continue to slash support for higher education while ratcheting up performance accountability. According to Dennis Jones, President of the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), growth in state funding for higher education over the next eight years will continue to lag expenditures for all state programs by 5.7% (2005, p. 4). Apparently, this funding disparity is largely due to the competing demands of mushrooming programs like Medicaid. At the same time, performance pressures upon both colleges and students continue to grow as states hike tuition instead of increasing direct funding to pay for the growing costs of operations. Peter Ewell, an assessment scholar, has commented that accountability, the measurable demonstration of improvement, is the consequence of postsecondary education institutions not adequately explaining why students don’t succeed in their learning goals (1997). The piecemeal, isolated progress many colleges have made to organize for learning improvement has precipitated pressure from employers, politicians, and citizen groups to accelerate the pace of improvement.

Clara Lovett (2005), former president of Northern Arizona University, recently editorialized on the reasons why higher education is caught in this squeeze. The new consumers of higher education products, she says, are low-income parents who can’t afford the price tag the middle class has long been willing to pay for quality schools.
While they do not understand the complexities involved in large-scale productivity improvement needed to keep costs from rising more quickly than inflation, they have put their legislators on notice that their kids must have an education. Unfortunately, it is these students, often the first in their families to attend college, who are under-prepared for the academic and emotional hurdles of the higher education experience.

What we know from educational research thus far is that many students fail because poor academic preparation keeps them from adequately mastering course outcomes (Windham, 2002). Of the over 42,000 first time in college, degree-seeking students who matriculated in Florida community colleges immediately after high school in 2001 and took an entry level test, 73% failed at least one subtest in reading, writing, or math (Florida Department of Education, 2004, p.1), making them ineligible to take many college-level courses without remediation. Forty-three percent of this cohort failed the reading subtest. Reading preparation, in particular, is the gatekeeper to success in all other coursework, even college preparatory courses like writing and mathematics.

Supporting this assertion, President Freeman Hrabowski of the University of Maryland-Baltimore County, a leading advocate for African American student achievement in math and science, recently commented on PBS News Hour that nothing was more important for student success than critical reading skills because the ability to understand math problems depended upon it (Hrabowski, 2005).

One aspect of preparing students for academic success is helping them acquire good study attitudes. Of the 6,250 students who took the Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) in Spring 2004 and were matched to the Florida Community College Student Data Base, 35% of those with high GPA (3.0 or higher)
never went to class without completing readings or assignments, a measure of effort.

However, only 19% of those with low GPA (less than 3.0) reported the same superlative effort (Windham, 2005, CCSSE highlights, p.1). Also, students who graduated that term with associate in arts degrees said they regularly communicated with their instructors. Reinforcing the notion that student-faculty communication is a valuable strategy for student success, only 3.5% of Associate in Arts (AA) graduates in this matched sample of CCSSE respondents stated that they never asked questions in class (p. 2).

The impact that improvements in course success could have upon an entire college system should not be underestimated. Improving the passing rate in any one course from 50 to 80% increases a student’s cumulative probability of success. For a full semester course load (five courses), the probability of success in this example improves from 3 to 33%, or ten-fold (Shugart, 2005). Failure in individual courses can lead to withdrawal from college. For an academically challenged female, the opportunity cost of failure to earn an associate degree can be as high as 44% of her earnings as a mere high school graduate (Bailey, Kienzel, & Marcotte, 2004, p. 11).

Improving the Effectiveness of Assessment Practice

In his imperative to higher education leaders, Peter Ewell admonished “To get systemic improvement, we must make use of what is already known about learning itself, about promoting learning, and about institutional change” (1997, p. 3). Following this reasoning, to accomplish the genuine transformations necessary to help more students succeed, colleges need to re-think how their various functions work together to accomplish goals for student learning. An advocate for this type of educational research
is Trudy Banta, who said that effective collaborative research on assessment would include “Integrating the value frameworks of other disciplines with those inherent in the professional role of assessment practitioner…as well as studying how the faculty role and criteria for performance intersect with those of practicing professionals in educational research, evaluation, and measurement” (2002, p. 98). The development of effective faculty-staff collaboration strategies on assessment may take up to seven years (Larson & Greene, 2002). However, colleges subject to the 2001 Principles of Accreditation of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools have recently had to develop and implement Quality Enhancement Plans requiring college-wide participation within one to two years.

Traditionally, the role of institutional research (IR) staff has been to transform data into meaningful information and to report it through institutionally determined channels, feeding planning and evaluation cycles. When given appropriate attention and resources, this process should lead to institutional effectiveness. However, a recently released study by Columbia University’s Community College Research Center (CCRC) advocates a stronger role for IR in community college leadership and involvement in student learning issues (Morest, 2005). This recommendation followed from the observation that institutional research currently has a more limited function in community colleges than in four-year institutions. Chapter Two will further explore the role of institutional research and other professionals in supporting the assessment efforts aimed at improving teaching and learning.

Kezar and Talburt (2004) advocate broadening the repertoire of approaches in educational research to provide more timely information concerning effective teaching
and learning strategies to other practitioners. For example, collaborative partners such as learning evidence teams that include assessment professionals such as IR staff members produce new knowledge through action research. This advocacy is important because “a proliferation of research approaches offers valuable forms of knowledge and insight to those concerned with the study and practice of higher education” (p. 1). In support of diversifying research principles, David W. Leslie, Chancellor Professor of Education at the College of William and Mary, said at a 2002 meeting of the Association for the Study of Higher Education that he was discouraged by his colleagues’ unwillingness to accept theories and methods of inquiry from other disciplines such as political science. He suggested that limiting higher education research models this way may be yielding “Trees without fruit” (Keller, 1985 in Leslie, 2002, p. 2). In fact, he advocated improving research by encouraging his colleagues to explore big ideas.

One “big” idea is that new roles in the management of research findings obtained through assessment, a form of action research, may help to transform colleges. The language of organizational learning and the new ways of examining student learning connect the process of solving student learning problems with knowledge management, a relatively new discipline. Faculty practitioners who meet to share information about their craft create new knowledge (Wegner, 1998) about how to help students in these communities of practice. However, knowledge management must be about more than simply cataloging what colleges know. It must also be about using what colleges know to drive curricular changes and resource application, thus improving both learning and assessment. A further discussion of action research, the development of cross-functional
communities of practice within community colleges, and the role of both in knowledge management will be explored in Chapter Two of this study.

Establishing effective assessment practices within institutions is a complex task. A comprehensive literature review undertaken in the late 1990s yielded a conceptual view of organizational and administrative support for learning assessment (Peterson, Augustine, Einarson, & Vaughan, 1999). In this model, support for assessment policies and practices, assessment culture and climate, external influences (such as accreditation), internal and external uses of assessment, and institutional context (such as public or private control and size) shaped a college’s institutional approach. The effectiveness of assessment thus had many dependencies, and factors outside of the classroom often impacted student learning. Chapter 2, Literature Review, contains a more complete discussion of theories of organizational transformation as they relate to assessment.

According to Richard Voorhees, a past president of the Association for Institutional Research, an alternative job of IR is to feed networks (2003). New ideas may germinate in unpredictable ways from the seeds of ideas planted by a catalyst member. These networks self-perpetuate, grow from the edges (rather than the center), and innovate more often when they exist within active, diverse communities. Thus, expertise required to conduct institutional research has expanded beyond measurement and reporting to effective brokering of knowledge and nurturing of networks. The capability within colleges to do this kind of “out of the box” thinking has become necessary to cope with the squeeze from the external environment. This view of strategy formation as an unplanned process is similar to Birnbaum’s (1988) anarchical institution model and to
Mintzberg’s (1989) grassroots model. These and other models of institutional change will be further elaborated in Chapter Two.

Researchers at Columbia Teacher’s College, have recently advocated a stronger role for institutional researchers in enriching college dialog about assessment (Morest, 2005). Moreover, Bailey, Alfonso, Calcagno, Jenkins, Keinzl, & Leinbach (2004) have advocated that institutions having higher than expected completion rates based upon their institutional characteristics should be studied for policy environments that may favor student success. Sunshine State Community College is one such case, with completion rates among full-time first-time in college students 4.6% higher than expected based upon institutional characteristics (Bailey et al, Florida Community College results as reported by Chancellor J. David Armstrong, p.1). Thus, the results of this study could potentially be important to the 275 or more large (with 2,500 or more students) rural community colleges in the U.S., a profile similar to that of Sunshine State Community College. These colleges represent 25.7% of 1,070 publicly controlled two-year colleges in the U.S. (Katsinas, 2003, p. 21). Also, Sunshine State Community College recently completed its Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Quality Enhancement Plan site visit and was thus in an excellent position to provide information related to accreditation-driven changes to other community colleges through this research.

In conclusion, helping students successfully complete a college education has recently become an urgent mission. One of the stumbling blocks many students must overcome in this journey is college preparatory reading. Colleges are therefore using student learning assessment and learning evidence teams to improve students’ chances for success. As the use of assessment becomes more prevalent because of accreditation
requirements, institutional research and teaching functions are moving closer to one another and learning more about the scholarship of teaching. The “measurement” intersection between their professions is where the data collection and interpretation process takes place. This process is critical to the use of data in ensuring the appropriate application of college resources to solve persistent problems in student learning.

Statement of the Problem

Colleges, according to higher education policy analysts (Ewell, 1997) have not adequately explained why students don’t succeed in their learning goals. However, establishing effective assessment practices that would enable widespread continuous process improvement within institutions is a complex task. To do this, colleges are re-thinking how their various functions work together to improve student learning outcomes. Thus, while colleges may seek to use measurement professionals more effectively to aid faculty in improving student learning outcomes, the picture of how the two disciplines, from different institutional cultures, can quickly establish a working relationship to accomplish accreditation goals is incomplete.

Purpose of the Study

Focusing upon the intersections between community college faculty and assessment professionals in the task of planning for the improvement of student learning outcomes, the purpose of this case study was to describe, analyze, and interpret the experiences of these professionals as they built a culture of assessment in developmental reading and writing.
Significance of the Study

To begin the long evolution toward becoming cultures of evidence, colleges need to more effectively promote dialog about evidence of student learning (Maki, 2004). Pressure from governing boards for increased accountability and new accreditation rules have created a place where faculty, and assessment professionals such as institutional researchers, and quality enhancement leaders must strive to improve performance within the colleges they serve. According to Kezar (2001), while cultural models at the institutional level have shown great promise in explaining the success of specific change strategies, the higher education community knows very little about how department or functional level cultures affect organizational change (p. 130).

If institutional researchers or other assessment professionals are to perform an expanded role in student learning inquiries, they must be prepared to follow faculty members into their communities of practice. Chapter Four of this study presents findings and discusses specific collaborative approaches to identifying, analyzing, reporting, and improving student learning outcomes used at Sunshine State Community College. Chapter Five then discusses implications of these findings in terms of professional development for faculty and assessment staff, operational and policy changes needed to implement effective student learning outcomes assessment strategies, and the cultural conditions that determine the intersection between faculty members and assessment professionals.
Research Questions

Eight research questions were investigated in this case study of Sunshine State Community College.

1. How is the professional preparation and educational background of a developmental education faculty member like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?

2. How is the assessment role of a developmental education faculty member like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?

3. Which collaborative strategies serve to create common ground for faculty members and assessment professionals to work together on assessment plans?

4. Which strategies cause estrangement between faculty members and assessment professionals?

5. What role, if any, does an assessment professional play in determining how the results of student learning outcomes assessment will be used for improvement?

6. Have faculty members at the college become more like assessment professionals and assessment professionals more like faculty members in terms of their assessment roles since they began collaborating on student learning outcomes assessment?

7. If so, how have they become more alike?

8. From the perspective of respondents, which assessment approaches have shown the most promising results?

Limitations

While the co-curricular contributions of other community college faculty and staff members (as in learning resources) and academic administrators can greatly contribute to
student learning, this study is focused more narrowly on the interactions between faculty
members teaching developmental education courses and assessment professionals such as
institutional researchers. A study of the phenomenon of collaboration, this research offers
focused insights into a small but important segment of a much larger set of strategies
needed to conduct effective assessment within a community college.

Another limitation is that the boundaries of this case and the authenticity of
experience to each individual reader may or may not permit “naturalistic generalizations”
(Stake, 1995, p. 86) concerning the applicability of aspects of the case to the reader’s own
college. The technique used to enable readers to generalize from one case to another in
qualitative research is the use of “rich, thick description” (Merriam, 2002, p.29). This
technique, according to Merriam, “is a major strategy to ensure for external validity” (p.
29) in a qualitative study. Cronbach called these context-specific cases “working
hypotheses” (1975, in Merriam, 2002, p. 28). Precedents for these are case law and
medicine (p.29). Each reader must eventually decide on his or her own what portions of a
case apply to another and which do not.

Definition of Terms

This section describes terms used in this study of the student learning outcomes
assessment process.

Assessment:

…is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student
learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public;
setting appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality;
systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to
determine how well performance matches those expectations and
standards; and using the resulting information to document, explain,
and improve performance. (Angelo, 1995, p. 7)

A white paper on assessment by the League for Innovation in the Community
Colleges (2004, p.12) differentiated various types of assessment by purpose.

These are paraphrased below:

- **Diagnostic** assessment determines students’ prior knowledge. Examples of these are entry-level placement tests such as the SAT.

- **Formative** assessment measures and gives students progress reports on their learning. Examples of these are in-class quizzes.

- **Needs** assessments perform a gap analysis in either a student or institutional context. That is, such an assessment may determine the difference between students’ existing skills, attitudes, and knowledge and the level desired. A needs assessment may also determine the need for a particular program of instruction within a college.

- **Reaction** assessments measure students’ opinions of learning or learning support experiences. Examples of these are course evaluations.

- **Summative** assessments are measurements of student learning that will determine the assignment of a grade or completion of a milestone. Examples of these are midterm or final exams.
Assessment Professional: A non-faculty employee or consultant of the college who provides measurement, technical, or organizational skills to the implementation of student learning outcomes assessment.

Cognitive Dissonance: Festinger (1957) defined this as a mental state in which a new experience or phenomenon clashes with one’s beliefs or expectations. According to this theory, dissonance causes discomfort, motivating the person experiencing it to find ways to reduce it, often leading to changes in beliefs or attitudes.

Models of inquiry/research: The research model chosen reflects the environment in which the subjects are studied, the researcher’s orientation to the subject matter, and whether the inquiry seeks to explain or to understand (Stake, 1995). The following are terms that describe methods of inquiry:

Action: Research on site conducted by researchers or collaborative partnerships, such as learning assessment teams, provides valuable information concerning effective practice to other practitioners (Kezar & Talburt, 2004).

Case study: The purpose of case study, a form of qualitative research, is to understand human interaction between actors within a social unit, a single instance bounded by the case worker in the process of designing the research (Stake, 1995).

Organizational culture: A college’s culture is an invisible web that connects individuals through its most cherished values, beliefs, and symbols (Peterson et al, 1999). In colleges, culture manifests itself in mission, decision-making processes, orientation to educational change, responsibility for curriculum, and commitment to educational quality (Peterson, 2000). Culture may be inferred from “what people do (behaviors), what they say
(language), and some tension between what they do and what they ought to do as well as what they make and use (artifacts)” (Spradley, 1980 in Creswell, 1998, p.59).

Sources of organizational power: “Power is the ability to produce intended change in others, to influence them so that they will be more likely to act in accordance with one’s own preferences. Power is essential to coordinate and control the activities of people and groups…” (Birnbaum, 1988, pp. 12-13). The following are terms that describe power relationships within organizations:

**Coercive:** This type of power “is the ability to punish if a person does not accept one’s attempt at influence” (p. 13).

**Expert:** This type of power “is exercised when one person accepts influence from another because of a belief that the other person has some special knowledge or competence in a specific area” (p. 13).

**Legitimate:** This type of power “exists when both parties agree to a common code or standard that gives one party the right to influence the other in a specific range of activities or behaviors and obliges the other to comply” (p. 13).

**Referent:** This type of power “results from the willingness to be influenced by another because of one’s identification with the other” (p. 13). Such is the power of peer groups.

**Reward:** This type of power “is the ability of one person to offer or promise rewards to another or to remove or decrease negative influences” (p. 13).

**Tacit knowledge:** What a person understands about the world that cannot be expressed in words or symbols is tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1962).
Summary

This chapter has highlighted some of the reasons why helping students successfully complete a college education has recently become an urgent mission. Stumbling blocks many students must overcome in this journey are college preparatory reading and writing. Therefore, colleges are using student learning assessment and learning evidence teams to improve students’ chance for success. As the use of assessment becomes more prevalent, institutional research and teaching functions are moving closer to one another and learning more about the scholarship of teaching. The “measurement” intersection between their professions is where the data interpretation process takes place. This process is a lynchpin in the use of data to ensure the appropriate application of college resources to solve persistent problems in student learning.

Chapter Two will describe the corner of the stage upon which the actors in this case, faculty and assessment professionals, conduct student learning outcomes assessment while taking their cues from governing boards and accreditation agencies. The chapter will discuss governmental and accreditation causes of the acceleration of assessment process adoption, faculty and institutional research roles, the scholarship of assessment, relevant organizational change theory, examples of action research that have the potential to improve student learning and success, measurement opportunities for colleges, the Florida policy environment in which Sunshine State Community College operates, and challenges currently faced by their students.
Chapter Two

Review of the Literature

Although the policy and accreditation environments are squeezing colleges for improved student achievement, genuine transformation of institutional processes has been slow in forthcoming. As assessment scholars have long attested (Ewell, 1997; Peterson, Augustine, Einarson, & Vaughan, 1999; Banta, 2002), creating the conditions under which institutionally transforming assessment flourishes is a complex leadership process. A change in mental models (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994) used to conceptualize and solve problems usually precipitates this transformation. Further, the college’s cultural foundations that erode during the change process need to be shored up with new symbols, rituals, and practices (Weick, 1995). Therefore, this chapter will describe relevant organizational change theories. It will also explore the evolving roles of faculty and assessment professionals and describe the common interests of these professions. These writings should help to place the conclusions from interviews, field observations, and documents into a larger context: where actors at individual colleges must assess student learning outcomes and communicate their interpretations of that data to help college leaders navigate through a maze of strategic choices, thus improving student learning.
Mandates of the Higher Education Act

The U.S. Congress has been taking an increasingly active role in developing standards for accreditation (Wergin, 2005). In the 1992 reauthorization, lawmakers created a required list of items to be included in evaluations (such as college mission). The proposed extension pushes colleges to focus upon learning outcomes. If approved, the legislation would force increased transparency of accreditation reports to the public. In this demanding environment, accrediting agencies must not only ensure quality through peer review, but improve quality, as well. It is in this arena that continuous quality improvement through assessment has become de rigueur.

New Pressures from Accrediting Agencies

Community colleges which underwent scrutiny from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) in 2004 say that the agency is now shooting with real bullets: the outcomes of general education must be defined and each college must provide proof it has an ongoing learning assessment process. The SACS accreditation principles approved by the Commission on Colleges in 2001 institutionalized continuous process improvement through the adoption of Quality Enhancement Planning (Core Requirement 2.12). According to experts on assessment, the development of effective faculty-staff collaboration strategies on assessment may take up to seven years (Larson & Greene, 2002). However, colleges subject to the 2001 Principles of Accreditation of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools have recently had to develop and implement Quality Enhancement Plans to measurably improve student learning within a span of one to two years. Required elements of a Quality Enhancement Plan include:
(1) a focused topic (directly related to student learning),

(2) clear goals,

(3) adequate resources in place to implement the plan,

(4) evaluation strategies for determining the achievement of goals, and

(5) evidence of community development and support of the plan (SACS Resource Manual, 2005, p. 21)

Forging a path through this undiscovered country, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCACS), in conjunction with the American Association for Higher Education (and funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts), developed a document in 1999 called Levels of Implementation (Lopez, 2000) that describe progressive changes to organizational behavior observed in colleges as they adopt a culture of assessment. After reviewing 432 case studies (representing 44% of member institutions) from review teams, NCACS developed a matrix of institutional culture variables. Cultural variables included shared values, college mission, shared responsibility (among faculty, administration and board, and students). Institutional support variables included resources and structure. The fourth and final variable was efficacy of assessment. As did Peterson et al (1999), Lopez found that institutional culture played a pivotal role in the successful use of assessment for improvement. Institutions in the Lopez study were classified as having attained one of three progressive stages for each of the institutional culture variables: beginning, making progress, or maturing stages of continuous improvement. This evaluative tool can be used by institutions in conducting self-assessments of their internal processes in preparation for re-accreditation (p. 3).
The Lopez (2003) matrix contains three broad measures of institutional progress in improving assessment culture: *Beginning, making progress, and maturing stages of continuous improvement*. Within this framework, a college making progress on improving the collective values of its *institutional culture*, the first component of the matrix, should demonstrate the following behaviors (relevant to the scope of this study):

- …Student learning and assessment of student academic achievement are valued across the institution, departments, and programs. (p. 71)

A college making progress on improving its expressed *mission*, also part of institutional culture, should match this description:

- Some but not all of the institution’s assessment efforts are recognizably expressive of the sentiments about the importance of assessing and improving student learning found in the Mission and Purposes statements. (p. 72)

For a college to be making progress on the second component of the matrix, *shared responsibility*, *faculty* could be characterized by the following statements:

- …Faculty members are taking responsibility for ensuring that direct and indirect measures of student learning are aligned with the program’s educational goals and measurable objectives….

- Faculty members are becoming knowledgeable about the assessment program, its structures, components, and timetable.

- Faculty members are learning the vocabulary and practices used in effective assessment activities and are increasingly contributing to assessment discussions and activities.
• After receiving assessment data, faculty members are working to “close the feedback loop” by reviewing assessment information and identifying areas of strength and areas of possible improvement of student learning. (p. 73)

For a college to be making progress on the second component of the matrix, shared responsibility, *students* could be characterized by these statements:

• …There is student representation…on the assessment committees organized within the institution.

• The institution effectively communicates with students about the purposes of assessment at the institution and their roles in the assessment program. (p. 75)

The final piece of the shared responsibility component of the matrix is that of the administration and Board. In order to be making progress, the administration and Board should demonstrate the following behaviors:

• The Board, the CEO, and the executive officers of the institution express their understanding of the meaning, goals, characteristics, and value of the assessment program, verbally and in written communication.…

• The CAO [Chief Academic Officer] arranges for awards and public recognition to individuals, groups, and academic units making noteworthy progress in assessing and improving student learning. (p. 74)

The third component of the Lopez matrix is institutional support. In order to be making progress in institutional support, a college must provide *resources*. These are the characteristics of institutional support resources when a college is making progress:
• …In institutions without an Office of Institutional Research (OIR), knowledgeable staff and/or faculty members are given release time or additional compensation to provide these services.…

• Resources are made available to support assessment committees seeking to develop skills in assessing student learning.

• Resources are made available to departments seeking to implement their assessment programs and to test changes intended to improve student learning.

• The institution provides resources to support an annual assessment reporting cycle and its feedback processes.

• Assessment information sources such as an assessment newsletter and/or an assessment resource manual are made available to faculty to provide them with key assessment principles, concepts, models, and procedures. (p. 76).

In order to be making progress in institutional support, a college must also provide structures. These are the characteristics of institutional support structures in such colleges:

• There is an organizational chart and an annual calendar of the implementation of the assessment program.…

• The CEO or CAO has established a standing Assessment Committee, typically comprised of faculty, academic administrators, and representatives of the OIR and student government.
• The administration has enlarged the responsibility of the OIR to include instruction and support to the Assessment Committee, academic unit heads, and academic or program faculty. .

• Some or many academic units and the Curriculum Committee are requiring that faculty members indicate on the [course] syllabi and programs the measurable objectives for student learning and how student learning will be assessed.

• Members of the Assessment Committee serve as coaches and facilitators to individuals and departments working to develop or improve their assessment programs and activities.

• The Assessment Committee is working with unit heads and with faculty and student government leaders to develop effective feedback loops so that information (about assessment results) can be shared with all institutional constituencies and used to improve student learning. (p. 78)

The fourth and final component of the Lopez matrix is the efficacy of assessment. Colleges making progress in improving the efficacy of assessment demonstrate the following characteristics:

• …The data the assessment program collects are not useful in guiding effective change.

• Assessment data are being collected and reported but not being used to improve student learning.
• Faculty members are increasingly engaged in interpreting assessment results, discussing their implications, and recommending changes in academic programs and other areas …to improve learning….

• Assessment findings about the state of student learning are beginning to be incorporated into reviews of the academic program….

• The conclusions faculty reach after reviewing the assessment results and the recommendations they make regarding proposed changes in teaching methods, curriculum, course content, instructional resources, and academic support services are beginning to be incorporated into…planning and budgeting processes. (p. 79)

Colleges may be rated differently among the various components of the Levels of Implementation matrix. However, the making progress ratings described above represent the midpoint of the scale, with the beginning implementation falling below and the maturing stage of continuous improvement rising above. The matrix may be used by “Consultant-Evaluators on Evaluation Teams” (Lopez, 2000, p.6), by institutions studying the progress of their individual units, or as the basis of further institutional research. By comparison to the 2001 SACS Principles of Accreditation, a college that did not receive a recommendation on any of the Core Requirements (2.1 - 2.12) and did reasonably well on the Comprehensive Standards (3.1.1 – 3.10.7) after re-accreditation review would likely be at least making progress on most of the components of the NCACs matrix.
Robert Mundhenk (2004), the former director of assessment for the American Association for Higher Education, believes that community colleges are uniquely suited to balancing what Thomas Angelo (1999) calls the tension between assessment for accountability (governance) and assessment for improvement (accreditation). Examples of this suitability include vocational programs (certificate and Associate in Applied Science degrees), which are typically responsive to program advisory committees, and transfer programs (Associate in Arts/Associate in Science degrees), which are beholden to state universities for the quality of their students’ general education. Through proactive efforts to reorganize for learning assessment and thus improve student success, community colleges may thus be able to stave off threats to funding and autonomy, keeping their open-door colleges (Roueche & Roueche, 1994) open.

The Scholarship of Assessment

Establishing effective assessment practices within institutions is a complex task. A comprehensive literature review undertaken in the late 1990s yielded a conceptual view of organizational and administrative support for learning assessment (Peterson, Augustine, Einarson, & Vaughan, 1999). In this model, support for assessment, policies and practices, assessment culture and climate, external influences (such as accreditation), internal and external uses of assessment, and institutional context (such as public or private control and size) shaped a college’s institutional approach. The effectiveness of assessment thus had many dependencies, and factors outside of the classroom often impacted student learning.
The targets of these assessments were “cognitive, affective, and behavioral dimensions of student performance and development” (p. 2). In effective colleges, the results of assessment were used for improving instruction, and there was a common understanding of purpose.

Peterson et al (1999) conducted this comprehensive study of U.S. colleges and universities offering associate and bachelor’s degrees in January, 1998. The researchers received 1,393 surveys (out of 2,524 mailed) for a 55% response rate (1999, p. 10). Out of the surveys received, 548 were from community colleges. A profile of student assessment activity at community colleges emerged from this research. Seventy-three percent of community colleges said they had a governing body to oversee planning and policy change for student assessment (p. 73). Sixty-seven percent said that institutional research was a part of that group (p. 74). Forty-nine percent of community colleges indicated that institutional research staffers had operational responsibility for student assessment related activities (p. 75). However, where institutional researchers were engaged in student assessment activity, they rarely assumed a leadership role. Only 18% of community colleges said that an institutional research officer had executive responsibility for the institution-wide assessment planning group and only 20% indicated that an institutional research staffer had approval authority over changes to student learning assessment (p. 74). Further, only 2% of institutional researchers with operational responsibility for student assessment reported to an institutional research officer. Instead, 37% reported to the chief executive officer and 43% reported to the chief academic officer (p. 75). This indicates, as expected, that researchers in most colleges play a support role in assessment. However, more than half of community colleges reported that
they did not maintain an office to support faculty in developing curriculum or assessment strategies. Clearly, not all college “assessment” activity was tightly connected with classroom activity.

The researchers also found that community colleges faced different kinds of assessment implementation problems than did other kinds of institutions because of differences in governance (p.6). For example, while the faculty had less power and autonomy, administrators wielded more power than in four-year colleges. This imbalance of power, relative to other types of colleges, may have found administrators making decisions about whether (or how) faculty should do assessment, which opportunities they would have to learn how to do it, and how much support they would receive. Other features unique to community colleges were the diversity of both the community college mission and the student population (in comparison with four year colleges). These differences, the authors said, should be taken into consideration when developing a college-wide assessment plan.

The study also found differences between community colleges and all institutions in the types of assessment data collected. First, community colleges were less likely to collect cognitive data on student’s higher order thinking, general education, and major field progress and more likely to collect data on basic and vocational skills. Second, community colleges were less likely to assess students’ affective and behavioral development in areas related to personal and affective, institutional involvement, student satisfaction, and academic progress than all institutions. Community colleges, however, measured academic intentions more often than did all institutions. Third, community colleges were less likely than all institutions to link student engagement with academic
performance. The researchers therefore concluded that community colleges were not fully engaged with student assessment (or as engaged as four year institutions), perhaps because of the difficulties in conducting assessments on largely part-time commuter student populations.

While Peterson et al (1999) provided a snapshot of the way colleges had organized to do assessment from the perspective of policy, structure, and climate, other assessment scholars studied the improvement of assessment practice through action research. The assessment “movement” began to capture the attention of higher education in the early 1990s with the publication of the nine “Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning” in a volume of *Assessment Update* (Banta, 2004). A decade later, Trudy Banta published a set of hallmarks characteristic of organizations that are fully engaged in effectively planning, implementing, improving and sustaining assessment. Almost a dozen assessment scholars contributed their wisdom to this effective practice matrix. The major activities (planning, implementing, and sustaining) are similar to those in action research: “plan, act, observe, and reflect” (Suskie, 2004, p.8). In Banta’s (2004) model, the sustaining activity is comparable to a combination of the observation and reflection activity in action research, enabling the college to learn not only from the assessment measures, but also from the assessment process. These effective practices, synthesized below, include:

**Planning:**

- *External Influences.* Soliciting support from key stakeholders outside of the college including governing boards, employers, and community representatives
• *Engaging stakeholders.* Encouraging involvement from internal constituents including administrators, faculty, staff, and students

• *Focusing on goals.* Stating a clear purpose and relating strategies to institutional goals and values

• *Developing a plan.* Incorporating assessment approaches based upon explicit program objectives

• *Allowing Time.* Scheduling sufficient time to develop plans in response to a recognized need

**Implementing:**

• *Methods.* Using multiple measures to allow triangulation of findings

• *Faculty Development.* Developing faculty and staff expertise to implement assessment and use findings

• *Leadership.* Selecting knowledgeable leaders who make assessment everyone’s job, maintain unit level responsibility for the process, and conduct assessment on processes, not just outcomes

**Sustaining:**

• *Interpreting Findings.* Providing a continuously supportive, non-judgmental environment and communicating continuously (in plain English) with stakeholders and participants about processes, outcomes, and findings that serve as guides to improvement

• *Reporting Results.* Documenting valid and reliable evidence of student learning and institutional effectiveness, thus demonstrating institutional accountability to students, Board members, and to the community at large
• Using Results. Using results of ongoing assessments to improve programs and services

• Recognizing Success. Recognizing individuals who contribute and celebrating unit success stories

• Improving Assessment. Institutionalizing evaluation and improvement of the assessment process itself (Banta, 2004, pp. 2-8)

These hallmarks of good practice in learning assessment described by Banta provide a number of foreshadowed questions (Stake, 1995) for the field research within this case. Among these is the hallmark “interpreting findings.” This aspect of sustaining assessment planning makes a crucial connection between the analysis and reporting of data, and between reporting and the use of results. The first instance of interpretation, following analysis, is conducted from a measurement perspective. For example, “Was the finding of practical significance?” The second instance of interpretation is conducted from an institutional perspective. This occurs when assessment is linked to program review (Smith & Eder, 2004) or when institution-wide effectiveness committees try to make sense of the information (Birnbaum, 1988) in light of what they believe about the college and its students. Interpretation from the institutional perspective is thus a critical connection to the application of resources in the use of results.

A larger view of sense-making, however, is that it signifies much more than interpretation. Sense-making is actually a process of invention (Weick, 1995, p. 11), reducing the dissonance created when individuals are confronted with new realities. The stories people create to explain circumstances and events bring new perspectives to be
shared. This creative process forms new culture, replacing the broken symbols and antiquated rituals that institutional change has left in its wake.

One Corner of the Community College Stage

To improve teaching and learning in community colleges, college leaders provide professional development opportunities and enhance the conditions in which faculty members and institutional researchers exchange insights and formulate new strategies for curriculum, instruction, and assessment. By pooling their measurement expertise and teaching intuition and trying out new solutions to student learning problems, faculty members and researchers may gradually move the college toward graduating greater numbers of students. The development of an assessment culture, in which measurement is formative and faculty and staff members feel free to share their results (good or bad) without fear of recrimination, is essential to this partnership. As shown in Figure 1, the nexus between faculty and assessment professional roles as they collaborate on student learning, instruction, and measurement is the subject of this study.

![Figure 1: The Nexus between Faculty and Assessment Professional Roles](image-url)
Faculty

Cohen and Brawer (1996) commented that “as arbiters of the curriculum, the faculty transmit concepts and ideas, decide on course content and level, select textbooks, prepare and evaluate examinations, and generally structure learning conditions for students” (p. 73). This description implies great faculty control over the learning environment. However, an analysis of the 1999 National Study of Postsecondary Faculty (Wallin, 2005) determined that 63% (p. 21) of U.S. community college faculty were part-time. This portion of the faculty grew from only 52% (p. 15) in 1988. In Florida community colleges, part-timers accounted for 75% of 2003-2004 faculty headcount, but taught only 45% of all course sections (Windham, 2005, Number and percentage, p.1). Wallin (2005) portrays the faculty community as a house divided between the haves (full-timers) and have-nots (part-timers), who typically work for meager compensation (and few benefits) to maintain the financial viability of colleges. They often receive little orientation or pedagogical training before teaching a class and spend little time on campus, thus minimizing opportunities for student faculty interaction (one of the most important determinants of student success). Community college policy makers are understandably concerned about this trend. Wallin therefore recommends a variety of strategies to bring part-time faculty into the heart of their colleges through hiring practices, professional development, involvement in college committees, and collaboration on curriculum with full-time faculty. As it appears that the part-time faculty phenomenon is here to stay, it would behoove community colleges to involve them as partners in assessment activities with full-time faculty and institutional researchers.

According to a recent study of the Florida Community College system, this is particularly
true for faculty teaching developmental courses (Windham, Number and percentage, 2005). A study of Fall 2003 course sections by academic category revealed that part-time faculty taught 63% of all college preparatory sections state-wide. This percentage for college preparatory instruction stood in contrast to the Advanced and Professional (AP) category, in which the vast majority of courses carried college credit and university transfer attributes. Part-time faculty taught only 40% of AP course sections state-wide (p. 5).

Recently, with a renewed push by organizations such as the Lumina Foundation, colleges have been striving to greatly improve the chances for under-prepared students’ success, despite their disadvantages in family background, income, culture, and work status (Tinto, 2004). While a variety of academic support and student socialization strategies have improved success rates among at-risk students (Roeuche & Roeuche, 1993), faculty members have remained ultimately accountable for student learning. While a college faculty member has traditionally developed classroom instruction for students as a “solo act,” there is a new emphasis by accreditation agencies such as the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS, 2001) upon inquiry-based curricular processes. Faculty members and others who take part in learning communities (Milton, 2004) are documenting their systematic inquiries into student learning in courses and programs for the benefit of their institutions and their peers.

Meaning, practice, community, and identity, the components of Wenger’s (1998) social learning theory, are exemplified by faculty learning communities. First, meaning can be either individual or collective, but the way people experience life and the world around them is continually changing. This is particularly true for colleges transforming
under external pressures. Second, practice “is a way of talking about the shared historical
and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement
in action” (p. 5). It is through practicing the art of interpretation among multiple
stakeholders that a college is able to connect its needs with resources that can meet those
needs. Third, community lends value and recognition to individual and collective
pursuits. By recognizing faculty and staff members who are assessment “success stories,”
each member of the institution learns to place value on the effort. Fourth, identity
provides a framework for considering individual growth in the context of one’s
community. Faculty members who have taught for many years no longer need to feel that
they’ve hit a plateau and can advance no further. Assessment for internal improvement
provides mature faculty a means of continuing professional growth and improving
stature. All of these experiences are available to faculty who actively share knowledge
about assessment within local communities of practice. It is within this culture, with
resource support from administrators and technical support from assessment
professionals, that improving student learning outcomes through assessment activities
becomes possible (Banta, 2004).

Supporting this finding, Grunwald & Peterson (2003) found that the strongest
predictor of faculty satisfaction with and use of assessment was the college’s intention to
use student assessment for improvement (as opposed to accountability). This variable
accounted for 29% of their model’s variance (p. 193). Their study included a mix of
community college and four-year institutions, randomly sampling a set of 200 tenure-
track faculty (at each larger institution) and all administrators involved with assessment
activities.
The instrument used in the study, the Institutional Climate for Student Assessment (ICSA), took a snapshot of the attitudes and behaviors of faculty, institutional researchers, and academic administrators as indicators of institutional climate. Peterson (2000) used these measurements as background information for developing case studies in student learning outcomes assessment. By measuring these indicators over time, researchers could potentially gain insights into the changes in organizational culture that favored the use of and satisfaction with assessment for the improvement of teaching and learning.

Grunwald & Peterson’s (2003) national study of seven colleges and universities known for promoting the use of assessment for decision-making identified institutional context variables, as well as faculty and institutional characteristics, as reasons for the amount of faculty satisfaction and involvement in assessment processes. Satisfaction with approach to institutional assessment was greatest where faculty perceived that student assessment was frequently used for improvements in academic programs, student achievement, and instructional effectiveness. Likewise, satisfaction with approach was greatest where faculty believed that assessment had a major impact upon student retention, graduation, and satisfaction, or secured valuable external benefits such as grants or accreditation. However, overall faculty satisfaction with approach to institutional assessment was minimal where external accountability or governance was the major focus of assessment efforts.

Institution-wide activities such as faculty and student governance committees on assessment produced high satisfaction with support for assessment. However, faculty instructional impact was the highest predictor of satisfaction with institutional support.
This suggested that an avid interest in teaching and changes to instructional methods accompanied greater levels of satisfaction with institutional support for assessment. The lowest levels of faculty satisfaction with support for assessment, however, came from those who reported that institutional assessment had a variety of educational uses such as student affairs activities, distance learning initiatives, and resource allocation between institutional units.

Faculty involvement with assessment was enhanced by the use of assessment results in making decisions about tenure, promotion, or salary. However, by far the greatest predictor of involvement in assessment was faculty attitude toward assessment. Where a faculty member believed that assessment would lead to improved student learning, greater accommodation for diverse learning styles, and enhanced teaching effectiveness, faculty reported more involvement in assessment activities.

Enhancing a faculty member’s predisposition to use assessment toward improved course performance is an important step in professional development that is often neglected. Although seminars on assessment techniques usually produce a lot of enthusiasm, Kurz and Banta (2004) found that they could convince faculty of the value of using assessment with some individual guidance from instructional experts. These experts helped faculty in at least two ways. First, they assisted faculty in breaking down impasses in course learning into tiny steps, identifying the necessary pieces of prerequisite knowledge and practice and determining the sequence. Second, the experts suggested a number of simple Classroom Assessment Techniques (CATs; Angelo and Cross, 1993) for detecting small changes in learning, either in particular students or in groups of students. Examples of CATs used were minute paper, muddiest point, and
concept map (Angelo and Cross, 1993 in Kurz and Banta, 2004, p. 89). Other faculty used segments of exams or quizzes as pre- and post-assessments of learning. The researchers found pre-/post- measures to be effective in providing clear and convincing evidence of changes in students’ learning. Further, some participating faculty remarked that students “spontaneously expressed gratitude for the feedback provided by the assessments, and others commented that their students clearly felt empowered by these experiences” (p. 93). The conclusion of the study was that successful classroom assessment should be “simple and closely tied to the course and its learning experiences” (p. 93).

Institutional Researchers (IR) as Assessment Professionals

While researchers typically occupy a support role in learning outcomes assessment, a recently released study by Columbia University’s Community College Research Center advocated a much stronger role for IR in community college leadership and involvement in student learning issues (Morest, 2005) than is typical in colleges today. Morest, a presenter at the 2005 League for Innovation in the Community Colleges Conference, had these questions in mind when surveying a national sample of colleges:

- What are the capabilities and potential of institutional research?
- What data sources and methods are typically used?
- What are the priorities of institutional research, who sets these priorities, and what are the anticipated audiences? (p. 3)

Eighty-five out of a sample of 200 colleges responded to an electronic survey, and researchers personally interviewed staff from 30 colleges in 15 states (p. 2). Morest found
IR functions at these colleges to be thinly supported in a preliminary report on the research. Only 27% of colleges had IR departments of 1.5 full-time equivalent employees or more, 40% had a single IR position at the college, and 19% of colleges split IR with other duties (p.5). Researchers calculated frequencies and rates, but didn’t typically perform detailed analyses of data. The top priorities of IR were 1. accreditation, 2. retention, 3. graduation, 4. program review, and 5. enrollment. While more than half of responding colleges had faculty on IR committees, only 20% reported faculty involvement with projects, and 25% reported little or no faculty involvement with IR at all (p. 6). Fully 85% of those surveyed indicated a need for additional staff and almost 32% needed “upper level college administration to utilize institutional research” (p. 10) already gathered. Morest thereby concluded that at community colleges, “the focus of IR appears to be primarily related to college management, not research” (p. 11).

For colleges that wish to make better use of institutional research, the expertise required to conduct IR has evolved from mere reporting of college inputs and outputs (such as enrollment and graduation) in the 1960s to advanced measurement skills and knowledge gained from sources like the Association for Institutional Research and the certificate program at Indiana University (among others) in 2005. Today, IR may be called upon to convert knowledge and understanding from its tacit (task-oriented) form into explicit (transferable) form in a process called knowledge management (Treat, Kristovich, & Henry, 2004). This explicit knowledge may then be transferred to other units of the college or to other colleges (i.e., through research journals, conferences, and professional discourse). However, one does not always have to convert tacit into explicit knowledge to transmit its unspoken wisdom to others. Sometimes institutional processes
are not at all rational, but “messy.” By providing rich description and interpretation of an instance involving people and events, researchers may create case studies to enable others to understand the situational application of specific tacit knowledge.

Because new knowledge changes the old order of cultural foundations and political connections, colleges need to continually renew themselves by creating new culture and connections. In that case, people who work together engage in sense-making (Weick, 1979), a four-stage process. In organizing for this process of socially constructing meaning, people in an institution first experience something new in their environment (ecological change). In the second stage (enactment), they realize that the new phenomenon requires their attention. In the third stage, these occurrences take on a name (selection). This enables the college in the fourth stage to retain a common vocabulary and mutual understanding of what the occurrence means (retention). These constructed meanings filter people’s focus so that they see only these defined patterns within their environment, thus reinforcing socially constructed meanings. People who study phenomena in the field (such as socially constructed knowledge) may describe such an instance of complex relationships between people, objects, and institutions. This is known as a case study (Stake, 1995). Educational researchers have begun to incorporate case study methodology into their repertoire of inquiry methods (Southeastern Association of Community College Researchers, 2005).

According to Richard Voorhees, a past president of the Association for Institutional Research, an alternative job of IR is to feed networks (2003). New ideas may germinate in unpredictable ways from the seeds of ideas planted by a catalyst member. These networks self-perpetuate, grow from the edges (rather than the center), and
innovate more often when they exist within active, diverse communities. Thus, expertise required to conduct institutional research has expanded beyond measurement and reporting to effective brokering of knowledge and nurturing of networks. The capability within colleges to do this kind of “out of the box” thinking has become necessary for them to cope with the squeeze from their external environments.

Other Players: Theories of Organizational Change

Colleges are complex organizations whose purpose may differ depending upon the perspective of the observer (Birnbaum, 1988). One benefit of studying organizational theory is to allow a college decision maker to try on the perspectives of others when weighing the potential consequences of his actions. Deciding how to get things done means choosing which types of power to wield to accomplish college goals and meet the expectations of stakeholders. College leaders may coerce staff members to comply with distasteful edicts, but in most cases the leaders will suffer a backlash of staff resentment as a consequence. While leaders may be able to use legitimate power with people who agree with their subordinate status, faculty members are more likely to respond to influence exercised through a leader’s status as a knowledge expert. The next paragraphs will discuss the various means by which college leaders may influence organizational behavior.

Structure and Function: Organizations as Bureaucracies

Bolman & Deal (2003) use the concept of reframing to understand the complex nature of organizations by looking at them from multiple perspectives. One such
perspective comes from looking at colleges as if their organization charts defined them. Assumptions of the structural frame include management by objectives, division of labor, coordination and control, rational decision-making, form dependent upon task and technology, and structural change as a remedy for performance deficiency (Bolman & Deal, 2003). This scientific approach to management was first advocated in the early 1900s by industrial researcher Frederick Taylor (p. 45). A complex structure known as a matrix came into popularity in the 1960s to accommodate the growth of global corporations. While a corporate matrix might have countries on one axis and product lines on another, colleges might have campuses on one axis and functional departments on another. On the other hand, many colleges operate as “professional bureaucracies” (p.77). Instead of a characteristic pyramid, the organization has a flattened structure because there are many workers (professors) and few levels of authority between them and the college Chief Executive Officer. Restructuring may occur to accommodate changes in the environment, technology, growth, or leadership. In Particular, changes to college organizational hierarchies may occur in response to accreditation requirements.

**Power Relationships: The Political Frame**

A second frame for understanding organizational behavior is political. While the coercive, ugly side of politics is what often springs to mind, “Politics is simply the realistic process of making decisions and allocating resources in a context of scarcity and divergent interests” (p. 181). The political frame helps to explain the uses of power, the resolution of conflict, and the formation of influential coalitions with like “values, beliefs, information, interests, and perceptions of reality” (p. 186) that may serve to
redistribute power within an organization. Here, the boundary between the transformation of culture and the development of influential coalitions of like-minded individuals becomes blurry. However, as college culture changes to accommodate student learning outcomes assessment, so may the distribution of political power shift within the college (Kezar, 2001, p.41)

Professional Development: The Human Resources Frame

The human resource frame looks at the developmental needs of the humans (Bolman & Deal, 2003) who carry out the college mission and either directly or indirectly influence student learning outcomes. Faculty influence learning outcomes directly through their roles as “arbiters of the curriculum” (Cohen and Brawer, 1996, p. 73). Assessment professionals, on the other hand, influence learning outcomes indirectly through their support roles in the evaluation of curriculum and instruction.

Professional development is a driving need within an organization undergoing rapid change (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 372), either because of internal feedback from learning assessment results or external accountability demands. Learning new assessment concepts and methods toward fulfilling accreditation requirements, for example, eases the tensions caused by the upheaval of faculty roles within the college during periods of change.

Values, Beliefs, and Symbols: The Cultural Frame

Finnish philosopher Georg Henrick von Wright (1971) distinguished between explanation and understanding in the study of human interaction, saying that
understanding had a humanist emphasis. It allowed researchers to consider the aims and purposes of the actors in the course of unfolding events and the symbolic significance of cultural symbols and rites. While Bolman and Deal separated the symbolic frame from the structural, political, and human relations frames to explain organizational behavior from different points of view, other researchers viewed these frames as cultural types. A view of organizations from this perspective came from Wilkins & Ouchi (1983). Their study involved ethnographic data collection and observation, exploring the relationship between culture and performance. The authors created a paradigm for understanding the contribution of culture. The paradigm explained:

- under what conditions organizations developed a wealth of shared social knowledge,
- the relationship of culture to organizational efficiency, and
- how these perspectives could help researchers to understand cultural change within organizations.

Conditions that favored the development of shared knowledge within an organization might be determined by the exchange system operating within the culture. Wilkins and Ouchi found that a theory of transaction costs best explained why one type of culture was more efficient than others for certain types of exchange. In a market system of cultural governance, competition forces parties to establish a fair price for commitments. *Market* systems assume that a fair price can be determined. Where the pricing system is more ambiguous, a *bureaucratic* system may evolve. This has the advantage of reducing uncertainty for employees, who receive a regular pay check. For these wages, they submit to supervision, allowing the employer to minimize the potential
for behavior characterized by self-interest. Clan systems, however, deal with the problem of self-interest in a different way. By sharing a rich base of social knowledge, they see the exchange of favors as congruent, if not always equal. The trust that results from this belief in goal congruence causes them to believe that they will come out even in the long-run. The clan system requires the most work to maintain its culture. Factors that favor clan culture include stable membership, the lack of cultural alternatives, and the extent of interaction between members.

Efficiency in clans comes from the shared knowledge they bring to solving new problems, reducing miscommunication and misunderstanding. Also, their goal congruence establishes trust. Their shared stories give them a foundation for believing in the superiority of the collective. Clan culture, most often associated with faculty members in colleges, is the most efficient form of organization for work that is complex, ambiguous, or where there are interdependent exchanges involved. Market or bureaucratic cultures, most often associated with college business officers, are more efficient for exchanges that are simple and unambiguous.

Clan cultures tend to be more adaptive to change, especially those that focus more on principles than practice. A shared commitment to practice gives members more flexibility in solving unforeseen problems. Thus, understanding how change affects various cultural types differently helps to explain the benefits of using multiple leadership strategies within culturally complex institutions. Clan culture is an appropriate model for viewing faculty and their perceptions of organizational change within U.S. community colleges.
The values, rituals, and beliefs of faculty culture, however, stand in contrast to those of the college administrator. “A major frustration of life in loosely coupled systems is the difficulty of getting things to work the way the administrator wants them to” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 39). While the exercise of power is necessary to produce changes in individual behavior, coercive power alienates those subjected to it. More acceptable to faculty members are referent (influence) and expert (competence) power. According to Kezar, “Administrative power is based upon hierarchy; it values bureaucratic norms and structure, power and influence, rationality, and control and coordination of activities” (2001, p. 72). Community colleges are especially likely to have bureaucratic decision-making processes, says Kezar. Faculty participation is often limited to what is determined through collective bargaining. While attempting to maintain internal stability and control, administrators are buffeted by powerful environmental influences such as funding, enrollment, accountability, and accreditation. A political frame can sometimes be used to describe the manner in which such organizations function. “Political or dialectical models sometimes share assumptions with cultural models. Political models examine how a dominant culture shapes (and reshapes) organizational processes; this culture is referred to as the power culture” (p. 41). The very different cultures in which faculty and administrators (e.g., institutional researchers) typically operate set the scene for a clash of potentially competing interests.

Re-framing: Understanding the Complexity of Organizational Change

Bolman & Deal (2003) have advocated that leaders consider a broad range of strategies for undertaking organizational change. In implementing student learning
outcomes assessment plans, not dealing with an important aspect of the transition can spell failure for college initiatives. First, to overcome the anxiety people feel about organizational change, leaders should provide support, engage people in the process, and ensure professional development in assessment strategies and techniques. Second, to deal with the loss of stability, leaders should communicate with people, negotiating new policies and processes (including position responsibilities and institutional rewards). Third, to ease tensions between the empowered and the powerless, leaders should create venues for negotiating issues and interests. Examples of these are Institutional Effectiveness or Quality Enhancement Planning committees. Fourth and finally, leaders should cope with the loss of meaning by saying goodbye to the past while welcoming the future. For instance, Davidson County Community College said goodbye to their discarded strategic planning system by shredding old planning documents and burying them under a tree (Lobowski, Newsome, & Brooks, 2002). The symbol of their new planning process became the flip chart, representing the broadly participative process they had just adopted. Collectively, these four are essential strategies for dealing with change in the structural, human resource, political, and symbolic frames (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 372).

Loose-tight Coupling and Organization Change

Taking an alternative view of organizational change within colleges, Robert Birnbaum (1988) described academic institutions as collections of interacting subsystems that are either tightly or loosely coupled. Tight coupling permits units to act upon requirements of their college’s environment with a timely and rational response. For
example, the collective functions of a college’s business office (finance, accounting, purchasing, human resources, and payroll) are a tightly coupled subsystem. This type of intersection between units allows the college to remain in compliance with federal, state, and professional regulations, thus keeping the college’s doors open to students. The business office subsystem typically resembles a bureaucratic organizational model, characterized by rational decision-making processes, hierarchical structures, specific roles and responsibilities tied to job descriptions, and the exercise of authority through legitimate power. These staff members are reminiscent of Wilkins & Ouchi’s (1983) bureaucratic culture.

Faculty members, on the other hand, are loosely coupled with the administrators to whom they “report.” Faculty have great autonomy and academic freedom in their collegial subsystem and “The collegium’s emphasis on thoroughness and deliberation makes it likely that a greater number of approaches to a problem will be explored, and in greater depth, than would be true if greater attention were paid to efficiency and precision” (Birnbaum, 1988, p. 99). As such, they closely resemble members of Wilkins & Ouchi’s (1983) clan culture. In the collegial subsystem, individuals are considered equals. Therefore, faculty members are won over through the use of expert or referent power. In contrast to bureaucratic systems, the exercise of legitimate power within collegial units is considered a threat to faculty autonomy. Further, the exercise of coercive power carries the risk of alienating the very people who carry out the teaching and learning mission of the college. Instead, Birnbaum (1988) suggests that institutional leaders should follow these rules in leading collegial subsystems effectively (pp. 102-104):
• Conform to values treasured by group members to establish trust.
• Make the timely decisions the group expects of a leader.
• Use customary channels for communications with group members.
• Before issuing an edict, make sure that the terms are fair to the group.
• Listen without judgment as members talk, argue, and express their points of view.
• Reduce status differences by deemphasizing the gulf between leader and faculty.
• Encourage self-governance through conformity to group norms.

Another perspective on colleges is to view them as “organized anarchies” (p.153). Institutions can be characterized as anarchical if they have ambiguous goals, unclear reasons for the way they accomplish tasks, and fluid participation in decision-making groups such as task forces and committees. Loose coupling throughout the college permits a flow of streams containing “problems, solutions, [and] participants” (p. 160). In these institutions, “garbage cans” (p. 165) absorb the problems that decision-makers would rather avoid. Examples of garbage cans are long-range planning committees. Often, people who advocate a particular solution and are willing to spend time on fleshing it out will be positioned for selection if their particular issue suddenly becomes a “choice opportunity” (p. 160). Although contradictory approaches to leadership seem like a chaotic way to govern an organization, organized anarchy often serves colleges well. Over the years, it has enabled colleges to cope in an environment of conflicting and multiple expectations from various stakeholders.

There is a downside to this compromise, however. These loosely-coupled systems are stable, but contain highly complex and multiple variables that defy rational explanation or control. Their stability “is achieved through cybernetic controls – that is,
through self-correcting mechanisms that monitor organizational functions and provide attention cues, or negative feedback, to participants when things are not going well” (p. 179). John Tagg, an associate professor of English at Palomar College in California (and assessment scholar), believes that the problem with cybernetic systems is that they cannot re-program themselves when necessary (2005). To achieve long-term improvement in institutional effectiveness, Tagg has two recommendations:

First, core activities, including change processes, need to be de-coupled from the ritual classifications that now define organizational integrity and success. Second, the core activities of the institutions need to be more tightly coupled with significant learning outcomes.

(pp. 39-40)

Tagg believes that the data colleges currently collect, analyze, and report does not even begin to explain what colleges’ real problems are. Placing research activities closer to the classroom through action research may help colleges to establish clearer links between faculty work and student outcomes.

Colleges as Schools that Learn

To “see” the connections between teaching and learning, it may be necessary for faculty and researchers to find new ways of looking at familiar problems. By cultivating the five disciplines of learning organizations (personal mastery, mental models, shared vision, team learning, and systems thinking), colleges can develop a deep learning capacity (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994). Of these five disciplines, mental models are perhaps the most powerful tools of change. Humans develop mental
representations of how the world works that are reinforced by other humans around them. Where this process can go awry is when people climb a “ladder of inference” (p. 242) to arrive at these mental models based upon assumptions that:

- “Our beliefs are the truth
- The truth is obvious
- Our beliefs are based on real data
- The data we select are real data” (p. 242).

To validate or change mental models, Senge et al. advocate 1. reflecting upon one’s own thinking, thereby exposing personal assumptions, 2. making one’s reasoning visible to others, and 3. inquiring into others’ thinking to uncover their assumptions.

What a college would gain through this long-term development process is new skills and capabilities, new awareness and sensibilities, and new attitudes and beliefs (pp. 18-20). However, the development of this capacity is dependent upon the integrity of the architecture used to build it, a triangle of 1. guiding ideas; 2. theories, methods, and tools; and 3. innovations in infrastructure (e.g., policies, procedures, and reward systems). In other words:

People will work as a team and cooperate when they share common goals, receive proper information, have the skills to recognize, utilize and balance each others’ strengths and weaknesses, value teamwork, are rewarded for doing so, [and] are recognized as a team for doing a good job. (Hill’s Pet Nutrition, Inc. guiding principles in Senge et al, p. 41)
In the specific case of facilitating collaborations between institutional research staff and faculty members conducting assessment, it would certainly help if each saw the other as peers, had similar professional development opportunities, liked working together, and received similar recognition and rewards from their collaboration.

**Grassroots Model: The Anti-Strategic Plan**

Mintzberg (1989) proposed his grassroots model of strategic planning to counter a philosophy of leadership that strategies must be carefully and deliberately cultivated by a careful leader. The grassroots model has elements that mirror Birnbaum’s (1988) organizational anarchy and Senge et al’s (1994) learning organization. Richard Voorhees, a past president of the Association for Institutional Research, may have been thinking of the grassroots model when he said that an alternative job of IR was to feed networks (2003), which then grow in unanticipated directions. The principles of this model are:

1. Strategies initially grow like weeds in a garden, they are not cultivated like tomatoes in a hothouse.
2. These strategies can take root in all kinds of places, virtually anywhere people have the capacity to learn and the resources to support that capacity.
3. Such strategies become organizational when they become collective, that is, when the patterns proliferate to pervade the behavior of the organization at large.
4. The processes of proliferation may be conscious, but need not be; likewise, they may be managed but need not be.
5. New strategies, which may be emerging continuously, tend to pervade the organization during periods of change, which punctuate periods of more integrated continuity.

6. To manage this process is not to preconceive strategies but to recognize their emergence and intervene when appropriate. (p. 214-216)

**Action Research and Organizational Change: Case Studies**

Student learning outcomes assessment is a form of action research. The purpose of action research is “to improve one’s own work rather than make broad generalizations. Assessment’s four-step cycle of establishing learning goals, providing learning opportunities, assessing student learning, and using the results to improve the other three steps mirrors the four steps of action research: plan, act, observe, and reflect” (Suskie, 2004, p.8). As such, the case studies included in this section provide a glimpse into the world in which research and teaching and learning intersect and suggest successful strategies for carrying out that collaboration.

*Maricopa Community Colleges.* Larson & Greene (2002) studied faculty involvement in developing and measuring student learning outcomes. They wanted to know how measurement professionals could facilitate faculty use of outcomes assessment. In doing so, they developed a case study of assessment development at Mesa Community College in the Maricopa Community College District, Arizona. The authors documented the college’s seven-year evolution of its present college-wide outcomes
assessment program and their most recent effort to assist faculty in the refinement of numeracy outcomes assessment.

Mesa Community College holds an annual assessment week during which assessment measures are administered to a sample of classes. For example, a numeracy assessment (the student’s ability to use numbers as the basis for decision-making) would take place in an English class, rather than a math class, to maintain the institutional (rather than course-based) nature of the assessment process.

To develop a faculty-owned assessment process, the college must agree on the outcomes of education. At Mesa, the seven outcomes of general education are communication, numeracy, inquiry, information literacy, critical thinking & problem solving, cultural awareness, and art history & humanities. Workplace outcomes for occupational programs are critical thinking, organization, technology literacy, team work, ethics, and personal & professional development.

The authors noted that the college had reached a mature stage in the development of its assessment process, characterized by the extent of faculty adoption and use of assessment practices in making decisions about course and program improvement. Critical success factors in implementing effective learning outcomes assessment for Mesa Community College were:

- Faculty own the process and the results
  - Interdisciplinary faculty teams develop outcome measures
  - Faculty members administer the assessments
- Administrators support assessment as a faculty-driven process
• Institutional research provides technical support in designing assessments with good measurement principles

• Faculty, staff, and administrators use a common language for discussing assessment and using it for instructional improvement

• Collaboration requires time, effort, and tenacity among all parties (Larson & Greene, 2002, pp. 19-20)

The outcome of this effort has been the development of a culture of assessment within Mesa Community College. However, the fact that it took this college seven years (p. 3) to develop a mature approach to assessment (e.g., an assessment culture), should be an eye-opener to the uninitiated.

Practitioner as Researcher. In other research, Bensimon, Polkinghorne, Bauman, & Vallajo (2004) studied the impact of action research involving diverse students’ success upon the development of a culture of evidence. They developed a case study using a “practitioner as researcher” model to show the ways in which the measurements of student outcomes confront educators and motivate them to develop strategies to help failing students. Measurement consultants assisted work teams of faculty, staff, and administrators at colleges in developing balanced diversity scorecards for their institutions. One of the key elements was the use of graphic illustration, always in color. The success of practitioner research lay in the act of discovery more than in the measurements themselves.

While the authors had little experience with providing this type of consulting service to colleges, most (but not all) of their “clients” became successful users of data for institutional improvement and became advocates for measurement. The numbers
confronted educators’ institutional mythologies, producing the motivation to make changes in strategy. When team members became aware of the inequities in educational outcomes, for many it was a real epiphany. “Overwhelming,” one woman said.

The authors found that while measurement introduced college faculty, staff, and administrators to the reality of their students’ academic outcomes, their emotional response to the data motivated them to find solutions to the students’ learning problems. Assessment professionals at community colleges may thus use this strategy to introduce a new generation of practitioners at their own institutions to the impact of well-designed and meaningful measurement processes.

*Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning.* In the previous example, researchers acted as external consultants in facilitating the development of communities of practice. However, a more systematic method of creating and sustaining these learning communities within an institution is Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning (CASL) (Langer, Colton, & Goff, 2003). The proponents of CASL say that transformative learning that results from reflective inquiry changes both the practice of teaching and learning and the teacher’s knowledge and beliefs. The mechanism through which reflective inquiry drives these changes is cognitive dissonance (Festinger, 1957). In CASL, dissonance arises when teachers “pose questions, view situations from multiple perspectives, examine their personal beliefs and assumptions, and experiment with new approaches” (Langer, Colton, & Goff, 2003, p. 27). This benefit does not come without personal risks, however. CASL processes must take place within an atmosphere of collaboration and trust to secure the honesty and openness necessary among participants in the discovery process.
Rather than focusing upon a “best practices” one size fits all approach to professional development, the CASL process causes a teacher to engage in reflective inquiry when determining how to best help individual students over their learning hurdles. This self-awareness is a defense against “habituated perception” (p. 33), which occurs when teachers see only what they expect to see and miss important clues that could lead students to learning breakthroughs. According to Senge et al, the mechanism that causes this blindness is the teacher’s mental model (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994) of how student learning takes place. It is only by verbalizing her thought processes with a supportive group of peers that the teacher’s assumptions can be discerned, challenged, and revised.

Student Learning Problems and Measurement Opportunities

Policy makers’ dissatisfaction with student graduation rates has created a “crisis in developmental education” (Brothen & Wambach, 2004, p. 16). According to Clifford Adelman, Senior Research Analyst for the U.S. Department of Education, although current minority students have greater access to higher education, “the degree completion gap remains stubbornly wide at 20% or higher” (1999, p. 4). This section of the literature review will discuss educational research methods and findings that serve to enlighten community college approaches to assessing student learning outcomes at particular colleges. Colleges that adopt these approaches study individuals or groups of students for these characteristics that matter to learning.
Using a transcript analysis method to gather student academic resources (Carnegie units), remediation, and other variables on the High School and Beyond/Sophomore (HS&B/SO) longitudinal cohort form 1980 to 1993, Adelman found that of students who attained a bachelor’s degree by 1993, the amount of remedial course work required had a negative association with completion. While those with no remedial courses (50.7% of cohort) completed at a rate of 68.9%, students needing any remedial reading course (10.2% of same cohort) completed a bachelor’s degree at a rate on only 39.3% (p. 74). In Adelman’s words, “Academic preparation, continuous enrollment, and early academic performance… prove to be what counts” (p. 83).

Parents’ level of education, a component of the variable “socioeconomic status” contributed a small but significant amount of variability to Adelman’s final model. A just-released study of first generation in college students reinforces this finding. About 43% of 1992 high school graduates who entered postsecondary education within eight years and whose parents had not attended college had left without a degree by 2000 (Chen & Carroll, 2005, p. iii). While 68% of students who had at least one college-educated parent graduated within this eight-year period, only 24% of first generation in college students had done so. At least some of the blame for their lower success rates may be found in weak high school academic preparation for college. As many as 55% of first generation in college students required at least one remedial course, while only 27% of students with a college-educated parent did so (p. iv –v).
Study Attitudes

What seems to be central to student success in many cases is a drive to succeed by utilizing whatever sources of support the student can muster. Illustrating this concept is the work of Karl Boughan of Prince George’s Community College in Maryland (2000). Boughan used a 1990 cohort of first-time college entrants that included 43 variables encompassing socioeconomic information from census tracts, university articulation, attendance, remediation, course performance, study progress, financial aid, and use of support services to study the determinants of student achievement over a six-year period. An analytical process using Structural Equation Modeling (SEM) revealed the centrality of study attitudes in student success and found two semi-independent paths. The effort trail began with characteristics of traditional students and progressed through transfer program orientation, institutional support, course load, and enrollment persistence. On the other hand, the performance trail began with the students’ socio-economic attributes and proceeded through level of preparation for college. Study attitude, positioned in the center of the model, had a relatively high probability and connections to many other factors. The strength of this factor’s association with so many others was an unanticipated finding of the study (p. 11).

Engagement

In answer to the need to study institutional practices adhering to the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Instruction (Chickering & Gamson, 1987), assessment scholars at Indiana University developed and piloted the National Survey of Student Engagement (NSSE—pronounced “nessie”) in 1999 (Marti, 2004). After two
years of NSSE field tests in four-year colleges, these same scholars, in association with the Community College Leadership Program at the University of Texas, adapted the CCSSE (pronounced “cessie”) for use in community colleges. The surveys are close cousins, as the instruments share approximately 71% of content (p. 1).

The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) is one method of assessment that colleges can use to benchmark student engagement with learning from year to year. The developers of the CCSSE answered the community college challenges described by Peterson et al (1999) by developing an “indirect” assessment tool for measuring student engagement with learning based upon the Seven Principles for Good Practice in Undergraduate Instruction (Chickering & Gamson, 1987). The survey provides community colleges an opportunity to benchmark their improvement process, providing indirect measures of student learning experience and telling a story of the students’ personal goals, progress toward intellectual and personal growth, developmental needs, and barriers to full participation in college. A total of 152 institutions across 30 states participated in the 2004 administration of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, including all 28 Florida Community Colleges.

**Diversity**

Hardin (1998) identifies a set of seven profiles for the diverse collection of students who have arrived at developmental education’s doorstep. Among these are the student who makes poor academic decisions, the adult student, the student with a disability, the ignored student, the student with limited English proficiency, the academic system user, and the extreme case. About two-thirds of college preparatory students are
White, the other one-third comprised of mostly African American and Hispanic students (Boylan, Bonham, & White, 1999). College preparatory students are thus a cultural “grab bag.” They are greatly diverse, not only in terms of demographics, but also in terms of their expectations from and their academic foundations for developmental course work.

_Growth and Development_

Student experiences and study habits reflect student growth in self-image, self-esteem, internal locus of control, intellectual and personal growth, and family support of the student’s academic career (Harvey-Smith, 2002). According to Harvey-Smith, these characteristics are associated with higher self-reported GPA and overall satisfaction with college experience, particularly among minority and at-risk students. There are two competing philosophies in the scholarship of student development. One would prefer to centralize college student development to more efficiently funnel students through a single screening system that triages and then develops student deficits (Roueche, Roueche, & Ely, 2001). The other would diffuse its benefits throughout the components of the college curriculum by having faculty continually reinforce beneficial habits such as reflection, self-monitoring, and active learning (Bothen & Wambach, 2004).

Today, many students seeking to improve their chances for success by achieving a degree must overcome the hurdle of completing college preparatory courses. Although minority students have greater access to higher education than ever before, their chances for college success remain lower than those of white students (Adelman, 1999). Without an overall college plan to deal with students who are just entering college (and needing developmental course work), students may not understand the long-term benefits of
taking a master student course. They may thus overlook the opportunity to improve their ability to learn and develop the social connections that can help them succeed in college. On the other hand, if college educators cannot prove significant benefits of orientation courses or first-year programs to entering students, they will be hard-pressed to create policies and allocate resources toward improving students’ access to self-improvement resources. Well-crafted faculty-driven action research can make the connections between students, instruction, and success.

Beyond coping skills, however, in helping students become better acquainted with their institution, assessment experts advocate publishing policies on and talking to students about learning assessment in support of institutional improvement (Lopez, 1999). Apparently, not involving students as actively participating stakeholders in the assessment process can leave students feeling cynical and disenfranchised. “Students in colleges and universities where they have not been purposively educated about their institution’s assessment program….have no way to make the connection between a nationally normed test and the published goals for the curriculum”(p. 21). On the other hand, students who have read about the purpose of assessments in college publications or discussed them with faculty members can become strong advocates for using assessment for curricular improvement, particularly when provided their scores on these tests to use as formative feedback.

*Best Practices in Developmental Education*

The ideal program in developmental education helps all students, regardless of their level of competency when they enter college (Boylan, 2002). According to the
National Association for Developmental Education, it helps “underprepared students prepare, prepared students advance, and advanced students excel” (p. 3). The most important contributions that institutional researchers may make to developmental education programs are in the areas of strategic planning, program evaluation, and grant research. Other key components include centralized coordination of developmental activities, systematic delivery of a specific set of services, and the teaching of critical thinking skills. The impact of community college collaboration between faculty and assessment professionals on these best practices is discussed in Chapter Five.

**Strategic Planning.** According to Boylan, “developmental programs with written statements of mission, goals, and objectives had higher student pass rates in developmental courses than programs without such statements” (p.19). Further, students in such programs tended to pass state-mandated tests and continue their enrollment more often.

**Program Evaluation.** “Few program components are more important than evaluation”(p. 39). Consistent reporting on the successes, failures, and problem of these programs institution-wide kept developmental education visible, thereby reinforcing it as an institutional priority (p.23).

**Grant Research.** “Title III grants are designed to strengthen institutions with large numbers of economically disadvantaged students” (p. 29). Other grant opportunities include Title IV federal programs like TRIO (student support services for first generation, disabled, or low-income students), Talent Search, and Upward Bound. In addition to federal grants, there are philanthropic organizations (such as Lumina) that provide grant money toward the improvement of educational opportunities.
Centralized Coordination. While highly coordinated decentralized services can sometimes come close to the performance of centralized services, centralized programs perform best and typically have: 1. Subject areas (e.g. reading, writing, math) coordinated under a single department, 2. a single philosophy to guide the delivery of services, 3. support services and labs within the department, and 4. a single program director for college-wide developmental education.

Systematically Delivered Services. The set of services that all entering students should find available include entry-level testing, advising, courses or workshops on study strategies, tutoring, supplemental instruction (often by computer), and learning labs with assistance available (p.27). Advising and teaching are well-coordinated, and one reinforces the other (p. 60).

Critical Thinking. Developmental courses should strive to give students not only basic skills, but also teach “application, transfer, and thinking skills” (p.94) in order to prepare students for success in credit-level course work.

Policies Governing Developmental Education in Florida

Florida Community College system approaches to student development have been shaped by Florida statutes, State Board rules, Southern Association for Colleges and Schools accreditation, and curricular innovation.

Student Success and Institutional Characteristics. Although student academic preparation plays a strong role in students’ chance for successful graduation, researchers at the Community College Research Center (CCRC) at Columbia University have begun to look to institutional characteristics and policies as correlates of student attainment by
studying IPEDS variables of entire state systems of community colleges (Bailey, Alfonso, Calcagno, Jenkins, Keinzl, & Leinbach, 2004). Underwritten by the Lumina Foundation’s “Achieving the Dream: Community Colleges Count” program, the study employed explanatory variables such as reference group (urban, suburban, or rural), size (in terms of full-time equivalent enrollment (FTE)), racial/ethnic make-up, percent part-time students, percent female, mix of certificates and associate degrees, average in-state tuition, federal aid, and expenditures for instruction, academic support, and student services. Nationally, California, Florida, and Nebraska had the highest adjusted graduation rates, ostensibly because of particular legal and institutional factors. In Florida, for example, students are at a four-year transfer advantage when they complete an associate degree. In particular, Sunshine State Community College’s actual graduation rate in 2002-2003 was 4.6% higher than predicted by these model variables (Bailey et al, 2004). However, because IPEDS does not currently collect it, the model lacked information that many other studies have found to be important determinants of student success, such as student academic preparation and income.

Vincent Tinto’s (1993) student integration model served as one of the theoretical bases for CCRC’s model. This view of student attrition, the tendency to leave college, is founded in students’ social and intellectual integration into college life. The ultimate purpose of the ongoing Bailey et al research is to identify colleges graduating students at higher rates than their characteristics might suggest, narrowing the number of colleges to be studied in greater depth for institutional practices related to “changes in organization, teaching methods, counseling and student services, relationships to the community, and organizational philosophy” (Bailey et al, 2004, p. 6) that might suggest strategies for
college-wide reform. Centralized college student support programs such as those at the Community College of Denver and the Federal TRIO program provide orientation, specialized counseling, and mentoring for students and have been identified as effective solutions to helping under-prepared students in specific environments. Even so, this study of community college integration of research with practice “is not a search for the definitive answer of ‘what works.’ Rather, it is a constant and continuous process and conversation within and among colleges, and with outside researchers and policy makers, as practitioners try to improve their practice in the context of a constantly changing environment” (p. 63).

**Study Skills Courses.** While the Florida Statewide Course Numbering System (2005) lists dozens of “Student Life Skills” Courses, SLS 1101 courses are offered by 16 (57%) of Florida Community Colleges. The common course title is *Orientation to the Institution and its Resources* and its description reads:

> A program of orientation to college that includes an overview & discussion of the organization, personnel, regulations of the institution, & resources available to the student. The goal of the course is to assist the student to adapt and cope with a new environment. (p. 2)

While student life skills courses in Florida colleges go by a number of names and are intended to provide the student with college life coping skills, another learning outcome at some colleges is to help students learn how to learn, a set of skills often referred to as learning strategies (Roueche, Roueche, & Ely, 2001). Other study skills courses teach the “art of close reading” (Paul & Elder, 2003, p.36). Often referred to
as “critical thinking,” close reading is the ability to go beyond comprehension of individual words in a passage and to read with purpose.

**Diagnostic Testing.** Florida annually measures the “Readiness for College” of its high school graduates who matriculate in college the year after graduation. The State of Florida mandates assessment upon entering a field of study (Florida Statute 1008.30, 4a). While students may submit the results of SAT II or ACT-E entry level tests, the vast majority of students entering a Florida community college take the Florida Common Placement Level Test (CPT) upon matriculation. The Florida Legislature determines cutoff scores on all entry-level tests for placement into college preparatory instruction. The exit test from college preparatory instruction approved by the Council on Instructional Affairs (a governing entity of the Florida Association for Community Colleges) is the Florida College Basic Skills Exit Test (Bendickson, 2004). Passing scores on the exit test, however, are determined by individual colleges.

In 1998, half of all entering degree-seeking students required at least one college prep course. Sixty percent of females had passed entry level tests in each of the three tested areas: reading, writing, and math. Only 40% of males were similarly ready for college (Windham, 2002). In Fall 2001, of the over 42,000 first time in college degree-seeking students who matriculated in Florida community colleges immediately after high school and took an entry level test, 73% of males and females combined failed at least one subtest in reading, writing, or math (Florida Department of Education, 2004, p.1). Furthermore, of the 14,173 students who had failed the reading subtest, only 71.4% had completed their required reading preparatory courses within two years of matriculation.
Transcript Analysis. The Florida Community College system has prepared institutional researchers to both conduct college transcript research and to share SAS programs within a SAS User’s Group that meets bimonthly. The researchers use an annually released data base of Florida-wide student information in which the student identifiers have been scrambled through an algorithm. One of these programs is called “Longitudinal Tracking System,” and allows a college to trace the academic performance of its students from entry to exit. This program has been particularly helpful in examining the college credit course success of developmental education students.

In the view of some researchers, it is Florida’s policy environment that requires a common course numbering system, standardized placement criteria for placement in college preparatory instruction, and support for statewide research efforts that has allowed its students relatively greater success than in other systems.

Sunshine State Community College Measures

While classified as “large” (over 2,500 students) by Katsinas (2003, p. 21), Sunshine State Community College falls into the “medium” category by Community College Survey of Student Engagement measures. As with all Florida colleges their measurement approaches are dictated to some extent by state governance. Other approaches are determined by the college itself. For example, the standards for entry level testing and the cutoff for college prep placement are legislatively mandated. However, while the Council for Instructional Affairs-approved exit exam must indicate successful passage out of prep, the passing score is determined by the College. The following are other measurement approaches used by the college.
Engagement. The College participated in the 2004 administration of the Community College Survey of Student Engagement. Although they were not among the top performing colleges in 2004, student responses placed them above the national mean (50) in Active and Collaborative Learning and Student Effort. The College placed below the mean in Academic Challenge, Student-Faculty Interaction, and Support for Learners (Member Profiles, CCSSE, 2004). Improving the benchmark Student-Faculty Interaction among college preparatory students should prove especially challenging, as the College had a higher percentage of part-time faculty teaching college prep course sections than did the Florida Community College system in Fall 2003 at 63% (Windham, 2005, Number and Percentage, p.1-5).

Diversity. Sunshine State Community College’s headcount grew at almost double the rate of the Florida Community College system from 2001-2002 to 2004-2005 (Florida Department of Education, Student headcount, 2005, p.1). Most of the growth was in minority populations, especially Asian and Hispanic ethnicities. By contrast, most of the state-wide growth occurred in African American (20%) and Hispanic (30%) ethnicities.

The College had lower percentages of African American and Hispanic first time in college students placing into college preparatory instruction than did the Florida Community College system as a whole in Fall 2001 (Florida Department of Education, 2004, p.1). Prep completion rates (within two years) in Reading were comparable to the system rates for African American students, while writing completion rates for African American students were lower. However, with Hispanic students, just the opposite was true. Prep completion rates (within two years) in writing were comparable to the system rates for Hispanic students, while reading completion rates for Hispanic students were
lower. The college’s greatest college prep completion challenge for all ethnicities was Mathematics. The College’s average completion rates in Mathematics were comparable among African American, Hispanic, and White students, but were all well below the Florida Community College average.

Transcript Analysis. The College has used a consultant-written system to track the academic progress of students emerging from college preparatory reading and writing courses with a “C” or better. The program analyzes Student Data Base files and produces follow-up reports by ethnicity and gender with hours attempted and grade distributions for these cohorts that are either by term or by cumulative terms. The IR office also merges student identifiable data from CCSSE administrations to obtain a more complete profile of these students than the College would obtain from academic history only (Key informant, personal communication, May 20, 2004).

Progress on Assessment. As one of the first colleges to undergo re-accreditation under the SACS 2001 Principles of Accreditation, the college has had its initiation by fire. Assessment plans for the outcomes of general education and The Quality Enhancement Plan (Core requirements 2.7.3 and 2.12) have required Herculean efforts to complete. Recalling the Lopez (2000) study of hundreds of colleges in the North Central Accrediting Region, a matrix of institutional culture variables indicated progress toward the development of a mature student learning outcomes assessment culture. Having completed their milestone of re-accreditation, the College is now “making progress” in fully implementing its student learning outcomes assessment process. This study provides a picture of that progress from the viewpoint of faculty and assessment professionals involved in the implementation of their Quality Enhancement Plan.
Summary and Synthesis of Literature Review

Higher education policy makers are greatly dissatisfied with student graduation rates and expect colleges to make greater efforts to graduate academically under-prepared students. Current research indicates that family background, high school preparation, student effort, early success, and study attitudes are variables that place a student on a trajectory toward earning a degree. Colleges use a multitude of strategies to help under-prepared students, but the efforts are often uncoordinated and do not scale effectively college-wide. While a centralized model that marshals all student development resources at a single entry point has been effective in some schools, a model in which student development is diffused throughout the curriculum works well in others. To discover the determinants of student success at their particular institutions, faculty members and institutional researchers conduct action research called outcomes assessment. With the pace of change quickening in their macro-environments, colleges must continually find better ways to enhance teaching and learning. The evolution of this partnership is the subject of this case study.

To improve teaching and learning in community colleges, college leaders provide professional development and enhance the conditions in which faculty members and assessment professionals exchange insights and formulate new strategies for learning outcomes, instruction, and assessment. By pooling their measurement expertise and teaching intuition and trying out new solutions to student learning problems, faculty members and researchers may gradually move the college toward graduating greater numbers of students. The development of an assessment culture, in which measurement is formative and faculty and staff members feel free to share their results (good or bad)
without fear of recrimination, is essential to this partnership. This nexus between the roles of faculty and assessment professionals is also a focus of this study.

Within these cross-functional communities of practice, members discuss the results of assessment. This discussion may act as a catalyst, spurring faculty members to re-organize their mental pictures of how reading development takes place. In this process, the new information is rejected, acted upon, or deferred for future action. If deferred, it flows in the streams of a sometimes “anarchical” institution, waiting for a golden opportunity to deploy. College leaders that actively seek novel ways to make leaps in student success have their ears to the grapevine for promising strategies coming out of assessment plans. These leaders design feedback loops such as program reviews linked to assessment data and commission task forces whose job it is to bring a wide variety of stakeholders into the discussion of what works and how it can be scaled up. Leaders also schedule time for faculty and staff to make sense of what they have learned in renewing the college mission, telling new stories and establishing new symbols of institutional pride.

The literature review has identified the institutional roles in which faculty and assessment professionals operate. The common ground for these professions is the source of foreshadowed questions, both issue (research questions) and topical (background) that shaped the design for the collection of interviews, observations, and documents in this study.
Chapter Three

Methods

This chapter describes the process by which I conducted a case study on the phenomenon of collaboration on student learning outcomes assessment between faculty teaching developmental reading, writing, or study skills courses and assessment professionals at Sunshine State Community College.

Assumptions of Case Study Research

The purpose of a case study is to understand human interaction within a social unit, a single instance bounded by the case worker in the process of designing the research (Stake, 1995). While an intrinsic study may be undertaken to learn about a person or phenomenon that we simply want to know more about, an instrumental case study is developed to promote an understanding of specific issues. This paper is an example of an instrumental case study because it is the intersections between faculty and assessment professionals in improving teaching and learning that this researcher wished to understand.

Case study is an interpretive-hermeneutic category of research that falls under the more general umbrella of qualitative methods, *hermeneutics* being “the art and science of interpretation” (Yeaman, Hlynka, Anderson, Damarin, Muffoletto, 2001, p. 254). Stake
(1995) cited three major differences between case study and quantitative (i.e., survey) research methods:

1) While the purpose of inquiry is *explanation* in quantitative research, the purpose of inquiry is *understanding* in case study research.

2) Although the role of the researcher is *impersonal* in quantitative research, the role of the researcher is *personal* in case study research.

3) Knowledge within quantitative research is *discovered*. However, knowledge within a case study is *constructed*. (Stake, 1995, p. 37)

Finnish philosopher Georg Henrick von Wright (1971) further elaborated upon the difference between explanation and understanding and the personal role of the researcher, saying that understanding had a humanist emphasis. By seeking to understand (and going beyond explanation), one was able to empathize with the humans under study. Also, understanding allowed case workers to consider the aims and purposes of the actors in the course of unfolding events and the symbolic significance of cultural symbols and rites. Finally, in terms of discovering vs. constructing knowledge, *measuring and seeing* is characteristic of quantitative research and assumes that what one sees in the field can be described with measurements already developed (i.e., surveys). On the other hand, case study, a qualitative method, requires the researcher to *see, and then measure* (Stake, 1995). The researcher tries to understand and make an interpretation about what something means. The essence of case study is therefore describing what it’s like to be there. To accomplish this, case studies are characterized by rich description and interpretation of circumstances and events.
Sources of research questions studied within a case may be either “-etic” issues – those of the researcher – or “-emic” issues – those emerging from the actors during data collection (Stake, 1995). Further, there are two types of questions – issue and topical. Issues are dilemmas needing to be resolved, whereas topical questions relate to information that provides background and context for the case. While quantitative research can be carefully delineated, “emic” issues within a case study often cause the direction of the case to gradually transform (p. 21) while the research is in progress. The analysis of qualitative data is an inductive process that begins by the recognition and coding of broad themes and proceeds through the more specific connections between data collected and the research questions at issue.

Generalization in case study and evaluation is different than in quantitative research and can take three different forms (Adelman, Jenkins, & Kemmis, 1976). The first is from the instance in the case to others in the same class. For example, a case describing eighth grade student behavior in one public elementary school may generalize to eighth grade student behavior in another. The second is a generalization from the instance in the case to others in different classes. For example, the case describing student behavior in a public elementary school may generalize to students of any age at other institutions. The third is generalization about the case itself. In this type of generalization, the boundaries of the case are permeable, and the instance is not seen as a bounded system. This often occurs in studies that do not associate a case instance with a particular class. Generalizations in case studies are not just stepping stones to theoretical development and empirical research. They are valuable in their own right as stories that appeal to people who can relate to the tacit knowledge (Polanyi, 1962) demonstrated in
these instances. These are what Robert Stake calls “naturalistic generalizations” (1995, p. 86). While generalization outside the instance studied is a major goal of explanatory research, “the real business of case study is particularization, not generalization” (p. 8). Thus, studying the particular enables a case study worker to capture human experience in all of its complexity.

Reliability and validity issues in case studies are referred to as “trustworthiness” of the data. Justification of warranted assertions (generalization) is necessary within this methodology because each study frames its own view of the world within the body of the work, which must stand or fall on its own merits (Bartlett, 2005). “Trustworthiness” of the researcher’s conclusions relies upon triangulation, multiple sources of information, instruments, and methods.

While the form of qualitative research known as the “case study” has a different set of rules governing appropriate research conduct than do quantitative approaches, it is a tool that faculty and assessment professionals undertaking action research can use to document their experience, interactions, and knowledge to pass on to others. In that sense, it is an essential part of what people and institutions must do to engage in knowledge management.

Case Worker’s Orientation to Community College Assessment

I have been involved with community college institutional research since 1994. I currently serve as District Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Program Development for Edison College, located in Southwest Florida. I have served in many statewide organizations including the Research Committee of the Florida Community
College System, The Florida Association for Institutional Research (2004 President) and currently serve as the Chair for the Florida Association of Community Colleges (FACC) Institutional Effectiveness Commission. Participating in all of these organizations has allowed me to gather accreditation news from a vast network. Some colleges that won’t seek re-accreditation for years have not yet fully recognized the need for changes to organizational processes required by the 2001 SACS Principles of Accreditation. There is now an increasing curiosity about these new requirements, as shown by the vast numbers of people who attended the SACS Annual Meeting in Atlanta December 3-6, 2004. It was the first time I had ever seen the auditorium overflow for the opening keynote address. As a long-time Institutional Effectiveness (IE) staff member, I am becoming aware that my IE Commission must change the way it talks about and rewards exemplary practice or it will fail to interest instructional administrators and faculty, new partners in institutional effectiveness practice.

I became acquainted with the assessment literature while preparing to conduct this study and have now had one year of direct experience with student learning outcomes assessment. I began to work with faculty on assessment in June 2005, when Edison College received State Board of Education approval on its application to offer a site-based Bachelor of Public Safety Management degree. With subsequent SACS approval of the College’s substantive change application to grant baccalaureate degrees, faculty members have been challenged to lead curriculum development. They completed the process of updating all course outlines to conform to the set of general education outcomes approved in August 2005. On the heels of this exhausting process came the development of an assessment plan for these outcomes during the Spring and Summer
2006 terms. The Student Learning Outcomes Committee, of which I am a member, completed a pilot assessment of written communication outcomes and authored a complete set of rubrics for the assessment of general education competencies in Summer 2006. A SACS visit to the College is scheduled in February 2007.

Conceptual Framework for Current Study

As discussed in Chapter Two, faculty and assessment professionals work together in communities of practice to bring about effective assessment of student learning outcomes, establishing a common language and mutual understanding of the process. From a recap of that work by faculty and assessment professionals, indicators of group dynamics, communities of practice, and organization changes have surfaced. These themes, listed in Table 1, form the issues and theoretical framework of the case.

Measurement issues also arose in the collected data. The interview questions, both individual and group, come from these foreshadowed themes emerging from the review of the literature in Chapter 2. These issues and topics determined not only the questions asked but the items of interest that were recorded during field observations and selected from documents in this instrumental case study.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Table 1: Foreshadowed Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

**Mutual Understanding** - Communities of practice (social learning)
- Development of meaning, practice, community, identity (Wenger, 1998) through rewards, recognition, and sharing; intrinsic motivation; professional development; communication habits

**Structure** - Organizational determinants and targets of successful measurement practice
- Targets (skills, attitudes, performances), growth and development; engagement (Peterson, Augustine, Einarson, & Vaughan, 1999; Banta, 2002; Lopez, 1999)

**Process** - Knowledge management within college networks as cycles of sense-making, goal setting, and measurement
- Awareness (ecological change), attention (enactment), naming (selection), common vocabulary (retention) in the process of institutional sense-making and emergence of a new cultural identity through symbols, rituals, and language (Weick, 1979)
Table 1 is an example of a research map (Creswell, 1998, p. 95) in which the larger literature review is summarized into issues central to the study. I have used an interpretive approach to study the community of practice created by faculty and non-faculty assessment professionals at Sunshine State Community College through interviews, focus group discussion, field observations, and documents. The case study method of research was chosen because the research questions in the case require understanding, rather than explanation. While limited to these players on the campus of Sunshine State Community College, the case is also bounded by the development cycle for the college’s Quality Enhancement Plan, an essential component of its regional accreditation process, and the plan’s perceived antecedents in the genesis of the college’s learning enhancement focus.

Research Design

The study I have undertaken may be characterized as a form of qualitative research known as case study. This particular study may also be characterized as phenomenological, because of its emphasis upon interpretation of meaning from the perspective of the humans and their interactions under study (Merriam, 2002; Stake, 1995). In the conduct of this study, I refined the interview protocols through review by an expert panel, individually interviewed eight faculty members teaching developmental education courses, one instructional administrator, and two assessment professionals, collected college planning documents and publications, observed an awards assembly, and interviewed two assessment professionals in a focus group session with a semi-structured interview protocol.
Research Questions

Eight research questions are investigated in this case study of Sunshine State Community College.

1. How is the professional preparation and educational background of a developmental education faculty member like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?
2. How is the assessment role of a developmental education faculty member like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?
3. Which collaborative strategies serve to create common ground for faculty members and assessment professionals to work together on assessment plans?
4. Which strategies cause estrangement between faculty members and assessment professionals?
5. What role, if any, does an assessment professional play in determining how the results of student learning outcomes assessment will be used for improvement?
6. Have faculty members at the college become more like assessment professionals and assessment professionals more like faculty members in terms of their assessment roles since they began collaborating on student learning outcomes assessment?
7. If so, how have they become more alike?
8. From the perspective of respondents, which assessment approaches have shown the most promising results?

Population/ Unit of Study/ Sampling

In qualitative research, the selection of the unit of study is based upon “purposeful” (Merriam, 2002, p.12), rather than random sampling. In this case, the
college referred to as “Sunshine State Community College” has recently had an opportunity for self-examination through the Southern Association for Colleges and Schools re-accreditation process. This experience honed faculty and assessment professional self-reflection skills, thus making them responsive interviewees. While Sunshine State has not been identified by any expert group as exemplary in its approach to assessment, its student success rates relative to institutional characteristics have been exceptional among the 28 Florida Community Colleges. Bailey, Alfonso, Calcagno, Jenkins, Keinzl, & Leinbach (2004) have advocated that institutions having higher than expected completion rates based upon their institutional characteristics should be studied for environments that may favor student success. Sunshine State Community College is one such case, with completion rates among full-time first-time in college students 4.6% higher than expected based upon institutional characteristics (Bailey et al, Florida Community College results as reported by Chancellor J. David Armstrong, p.1). Further, they are one of the first Florida Community Colleges to undergo re-accreditation under the 2001 SACS *Principles of Accreditation*, which have been enforced only since 2004. Thus, the college is a student learning outcomes assessment pioneer in the SACS region. The knowledge attained through the re-accreditation process makes these assessment practitioners valuable informants of the process.

The recruitment and selection of interviewees for this study has likewise been purposeful. While I have used the term “assessment professional” to capture the broadest possible definition of college staff members who support faculty use of assessment, there is disagreement among the various communities that contribute to the research literature on assessment as to what these staff members should be called. For example, while some
researchers are calling upon Institutional Research to take on a larger role in supporting teaching and learning (Morest, 2005), the term “Institutional Research” itself connotes a strictly administrative function to many faculty members. “Assessment professionals” targeted for interviewing answer to various titles such as “Director of Institutional Research,” “Assessment Coordinator,” and “QEP Director.” Faculty members (full-time and part-time) recruited for interviews were those who taught developmental reading, writing, or study skills or who had been actively involved in the data collection, analysis, reporting, and interpretation aspects of the College’s Quality Enhancement Plan, which is focused upon developmental education.

The target number for individual interviews of faculty and reading/writing faculty supervisors was 12. During the data collection phase, I interviewed eight faculty members and an instructional administrator. The target number for “assessment professionals” was a census of all such staff members. I interviewed two assessment professionals individually and a third during a focus group session. A challenging but important part of the sampling process was obtaining a diverse mix of gender, ethnicity, and part-time faculty within the sample. Out of the individual interviews, three were male (27%), three were African American (27%), and two were part-time temporary faculty members (18%). The limited number of interviews with part-time faculty reflected the difficulty in securing interviews with adjuncts. While part-timers taught most of the developmental classes, they typically had full-time jobs outside of the college. This limited their available time on campus. Also, the unique circumstance of the limited numbers of assessment professionals interviewed in comparison to faculty was due to the
sparse staffing of these individuals on community college campuses. This circumstance is
discussed further in the Limitations section of Chapter Five.

Data Collection Procedures/ Timetable

Upon Internal Review Board approval, I began to refine the interview protocol
and document collection plan for all research questions through expert panel feedback. I
sought advice from five colleagues and scholars in academic affairs, institutional
effectiveness, assessment, measurement, and educators associated with the National
Association for Developmental Education.

Expert Panel Review Process. The recruitment process for the panel was to talk to
individuals about the subject of my study and ask for their participation on the panel.
Those who volunteered received a copy of the recruitment letter, interview protocols, and
document collection plan. Most of the correspondence was by email. My questions to
each member were:

In examining the interview protocols and document collection plan,

• If you were asked these questions, would you be able to answer them?
• If the phrasing is inappropriate, how would you re-word them?
• What am I not asking about successful collaboration on assessment that I should be
  asking?
• Do you know of other reports or studies (besides the ones listed) that would also
  inform the research questions?
The data collection period, initially planned for February and March, slid from mid-March to early May because of the delay in getting feedback from the expert review panel:

- **December 15th, 2005** -- Obtained permission from the Sunshine Community College executive board to conduct this study.

- **January, 2006** – Applied for USF Internal Review Board approval. Defended proposal successfully on January 19th. Obtained written consent from College President and secured access to appropriate College faculty and assessment/IE staff. Collected requested documents as they become available.

- **February** – Upon IRB approval, solicited advice from an expert panel on the content of research protocols.

- **March-April** - Completed suggested revisions to interview script from expert panel. Provided final version of interview script to IRB and College. Conducted individual interviews with faculty members (up to one hour each) and their supervisor. Conducted individual interviews with assessment/IR staff members and leaders (up to one hour each). The academic VP distributed copies of my recruitment letter to part-time faculty members (by department mail).

- **May** – Observed an annual college awards assembly. Conducted a focus group session (one hour) with 2 members of the IE staff. Began returning summaries of interviews to participants for member checks (verification of responses). Contacted interviewees for additional follow-ups for clarification, as needed.

  *Individual Interviews.* Driving to the campus the first time gave me a sense that I was approaching a region with a unique character. Horses trotted on a frontage road on
the left and stables passed by on the right. Along the highway, there was a carpet of tiny pink flowers covering the median and shoulder. Through a clearing of trees, I could see the effects of the hurricanes that had passed through the state over the past couple of years. The ground in one area had been cleared for development, leaving only the larger trees. In another area, small, thin trees bowed away from the sun, bent over permanently from the high winds that had whipped them at least twice in recent years. At the entrance to the college on a busy road off the highway stood a tall office building dedicated to community outreach programming. The campus roads featured banners welcoming people to the college. The banners along the road communicated aspects of the college’s philosophy, such as “dignity.” Reflecting upon the impressions I had collected on my way there, I felt ready to learn about the college’s approach to student learning outcomes assessment.

I had designed the individual interview questions to get college faculty and staff members to talk about their orientation to assessment as a tool for improving teaching and learning, to judge whether or not they had sufficient preparation for the task going in, how they had grown professionally (and in what ways), what the process looked like, what role(s) they played in making it work, and whether they felt as though it had made a difference for students. By examining their responses to these questions, I was able to probe the “assessment” intersection between the roles of faculty and assessment professionals. I was very pleasantly surprised at how well the interviews went. The answers were, at times, exceeding my expectations. I felt that the interview protocol was appropriate for the subject matter and that the changes that had been made to the interview (both sequence and wording) through the expert panel review had helped to
make the questions more understandable to the participants. My impression was that none of the individuals alone seemed to have a complete picture of what “assessment” at the college looked like. Each one seemed to have his or her own little window into the process. I thought about the purpose of doing this case study: to try to come up with what the larger picture looked like and see how the puzzle pieces fit together. I began to believe that through this study, I could enrich the larger view of assessment for the people who will carry the process forward.

During the interviews, I assigned a sequence number to each participant (i.e., “I-3” for interview participant 3). I then summarized the interviews and requested verification or corrections the participant might wish to make. Table 2 shows the interview protocol for individual faculty members and assessment professionals. Table 3 provides a cross-reference between the research questions and the individual interview questions.

Table 2: Individual Interview Protocol
(Revised according to expert panel feedback)

Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today. Although your responses will be recorded on tape, what you say will remain confidential. The purpose of my study is to identify collaboration strategies and techniques among faculty and non-faculty assessment professionals that have helped you to build a “culture of assessment” in improving developmental communication skills.

(Note to Interviewer: Has the participant signed the consent form? ___)

Demographic questions:
Do you have faculty status at your College? ___
If so, do you teach full-time or part-time? ____
Do you teach any developmental courses (reading, writing, or study skills) in a typical semester? ____

Comment: The use of assessment results for improvement of programs and services is one of the dozen SACS Principles of Accreditation that all colleges reviewed in 2004 received recommendations on. It's something that colleges are trying hard to improve.

Substantive questions:
01. a. If student learning outcomes assessment is measuring what students have learned for the purpose of improving instruction, do you participate in assessment activities? b. If so, please describe the process and your role. c. (If participating in SLO) Since your most recent assessment cycle, what improvements to the process have been made going into the next cycle?
Table 2 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>02. How do you define student success? a. Are any state-mandated tests used in assessing communication</td>
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<tr>
<td>skills? Commercially or locally developed assessments? Institutional research reports? If so, please</td>
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<tr>
<td>describe them. b. After reviewing assessment results, how do you determine what other information</td>
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<tr>
<td>might be needed?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03. a. Have you learned anything about teaching students in developmental courses that you didn't know a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>year ago? b. If so, what is that? c. How did you discover this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04. a) Have you learned anything about planning for the assessment of student learning outcomes that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>you didn't know a year ago? b) If so, what is that? c) How did you discover this?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05. a. Have any areas of your professional preparation or experience served you especially well in</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>conducting outcomes assessment? b. If yes, which ones? c. Are there any areas that you wish you'd had</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>more of? d. Are there any areas that you wish you'd had less of?</td>
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<tr>
<td>06. Do you have an assessment group? What are the various functions of its members? If people in your</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessment group have different roles and responsibilities in meetings (such as timekeeper, organizer,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>advocate, peacemaker, data analyzer, or advisor,), what role(s) do you play? Can you give me a recent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>example?</td>
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<tr>
<td>07. Have there been circumstances in which you've felt uncomfortable discussing the results of an</td>
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<td>assessment outcome with assessment/IE staff members? With faculty members? If so, how would you improve</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>the process of information sharing?</td>
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<tr>
<td>08. If differences between members of the group arise, how are they resolved?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09. Do part-time faculty members participate in assessment activities? If so, in what capacity?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. What do you think developmental educators (i.e., faculty members, assessment staff) could do to more</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>effectively use the results of student learning outcomes assessment for learning improvement? If so, what</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>are they?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 a. Do you feel that the College has had success so far in getting students through college preparatory</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>courses? b. If so, could you please describe for me one successful strategy that you think has been</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>particularly effective? In your answer, please think about the steps you (or your department) took to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>make that success occur and describe those.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Is there anything else you'd like to add to complete the picture of how student learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessment works at your college?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 3: Relationship of Research Questions to Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research Questions (Issues)</th>
<th>Interview Questions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. How is the professional preparation and educational background of a faculty member who teaches developmental education courses like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. How is the assessment role of a faculty member who teaches developmental education courses like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?</td>
<td>1, 2, 3, 4, 9, Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Which collaborative strategies serve to create common ground for faculty members and assessment professionals to work together on assessment plans?</td>
<td>1, 6, 9, 10, Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Which strategies cause estrangement between faculty members and assessment professionals?</td>
<td>1, 7, 8, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. What role, if any, does an assessment professional play in determining how the results of student learning outcomes assessment will be used for improvement?</td>
<td>1, 6, 10, 11, Focus Group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. Have faculty members at the college become more like assessment professionals and assessment professionals more like faculty members in terms of their assessment roles since they began collaborating on student learning outcomes assessment?</td>
<td>1, 3, 4, 5, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. If so, how have they become more alike?</td>
<td>1, 3, 4, 5, 9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. From the perspective of respondents, which assessment approaches have shown the most promising results?</td>
<td>10, 11, Focus Group</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

I recorded both individual and focus group interviews with faculty and assessment professionals on an Olympus DS-2 Digital Voice Recorder and an audio tape recorder. When most of the interviews had been completed, I began to transcribe the voice recordings using the DSS Player software included with the recorder. A convenient feature for transcription, the software has a control panel that allows playback as slow as 50% of normal speed without pitch distortion. Even so, each hour of interview took up to six hours to manually transcribe. A summary of each interview took another two to three hours to complete, depending upon the amount of relevant information the participant had provided. Participants received summaries of the interviews with a request for verification of the information in the summary. All but one of the participants provided
such verification. The additions and changes participants returned supplemented the interview transcriptions.

Field Observations. Impressions of the campus, the people, and the community were recorded as field observations beginning in March and concluding in May on the day of the college’s awards ceremony in the college auditorium. The morning of the awards ceremony, I ran into some faculty members I knew. They seemed to be torn between competing desires to check messages, locate colleagues to sit next to at the awards, and still maintain a friendly disposition toward me. Life was happening for some, but unraveling for others. It was hard to remain detached.

After the awards, in the sunlit courtyard next to the student services building, I spoke briefly with the president, thanking him for endorsing my study to the faculty. We briefly discussed my progress and he seemed genuinely surprised that I had managed to conduct as many as 11 individual interviews that term (Journal 5/5/2006).

Focus Group. Chen has advocated focus group interviews because the social environment in which they take place helps researchers to “capture real life drama. In such a group setting, the participants let the researcher know not only what they think, but also why and how they think this way. Sometimes, their opinions even change or evolve during the meeting as a result of the exchanges and stimulations shared by group participants” (2004, p. 4). As this was an ideal way to capture dynamics within this community of practice, a further set of data collected was a focus group session with IR staff members, following a field observation of the College awards assembly. Through this process, I planned to determine whether, from the perspective of the participants,
they had become part of a “whole” that was greater than the sum of its individual participants.

The focus group interview was an instance in which “emic” issues within the case study can cause the direction of the case to transform (Stake, 1995, p. 21) while the research is in progress. While the original concept for the focus group interview was based upon the five disciplines of learning organizations noted by Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith (1994), it became clear to me after completing several individual interviews on campus that a more appropriate theoretical model was “communities of practice,” described by Wenger, Snyder, & McDermott (2002). A revised interview protocol was subsequently approved by the Internal Review Board before the May 5th interview. The semi-structured interview protocol for the focus group is shown in Table 4.

Table 4: Focus Group Semi-Structured Protocol

| Thank you for agreeing to talk to me today. Although your responses will be recorded on tape, what you say will remain confidential within the context of my study. Please remember, however, that others in the room will hear what you say. The purpose of my study is to identify collaboration strategies and techniques among faculty and non-faculty assessment professionals that have helped you to build a “culture of assessment” in improving developmental reading, writing, and study skills courses. |
| Framework for substantive questions (copy provided to participant): |
| “Communities of practice” are “groups of people who share a concern, a set of problems, or a passion about a topic, and who deepen their knowledge and expertise in this area by interacting on an ongoing basis” (Wenger, Snyder, & McDermott, 2002, p.1). The structure of these communities includes: |
| 1. A well-defined domain of knowledge that helps to create a common identity and affirms the value of that knowledge to community members. |
| 2. A community that provides the “social fabric of learning,” relationships built upon mutual respect and trust. |
| 3. A practice that includes frameworks, tools, and ideas that members share. |
| Which characteristics of a “community of practice” do you recognize in your group? Please tell me more about these. |

(Note to Interviewer: Have all participants signed the consent form?)
Documents. In addition to the collection of voice responses from interviews, I collected documents such as the college strategic plan, assessment plans and use of results, student learning outcomes reports, and position descriptions. These documents provided additional information on the college’s assessment planning, implementing, and sustaining efforts (Banta, 2004). This third source of data permitted triangulation, helping to ensure the trustworthiness of the research. Table 5 lists documents collected to supplement data from individual and focus group interviews.

Table 5: Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Dissemination Method</th>
<th>Role: What does it do for consumers of the information?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Plan</td>
<td>Intranet</td>
<td>Provides direction for college faculty and staff activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning Documents Diagram (flowchart)</td>
<td>Intranet</td>
<td>Describes the relationship between various College planning and reporting processes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>QEP Committee Roster</td>
<td>Intranet</td>
<td>Assigns responsibility for QEP membership</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Quality Enhancement Plan (Developmental Education)</td>
<td>Intranet</td>
<td>Describes strategies and five-year timeline for improving the success of college prep students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response to the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee</td>
<td>Intranet</td>
<td>Responds to suggestions for improving specific plan elements</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Outcomes Assessment Task Force Report (General Education)</td>
<td>Intranet</td>
<td>Evaluates progress on measuring and improving college learning outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The Institutional Learning Outcomes Process</td>
<td>Intranet</td>
<td>Recounts the timeline of events leading to the current general education outcomes assessment process.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What We Know About Student Learning</td>
<td>Intranet</td>
<td>Aids budget development.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Position Descriptions</td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Assigns tasks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty Handbook</td>
<td>Intranet</td>
<td>Explains faculty roles and responsibilities; communicates policy and procedure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>College-wide And Faculty Newsletters</td>
<td>Internet</td>
<td>Informs college (since 1985)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Informs faculty (since 2000)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Newspaper published monthly</td>
<td>Hardcopy tabloid</td>
<td>Informs students; has features and advertising of interest to the wider community</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Longitudinal Tracking System</td>
<td>Hardcopy</td>
<td>Informs external constituents of an institutional research practice initiated in 2002</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5 (Continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Source</th>
<th>Dissemination Method</th>
<th>Role: What does it do for consumers of the information?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

Data Analysis Process

Creswell (1998) describes the inductive analysis of qualitative data as a “data analysis spiral” (p.143). The process begins with the collection of text and images through interviews, observations, and documents. Creswell advocates getting a sense of the entire database holistically by reading and re-reading the transcripts. At this time, the case worker may write memos in the margins of transcripts or field notes that contain key concepts or phrases. Sometimes it helps to disregard the actual question that precipitated a response and instead focus upon themes in the response. In the next level of the spiral, the responses are sorted into categories initiating the “describing, classifying, and interpreting loop” (p. 144). Classifying data requires the researcher to look for general themes or dimensions which serve as parents of children and grandchildren (sub-themes). Interpretation may then allow the researcher to connect themes to each other or to constructs elaborated in a research map (such as the list of Emergent Themes in Table 1).

According to Boyatzis (1998), thematic analysis can be used for at least five different analytical purposes. It can allow the researcher:

1. A way of seeing
2. A way of making sense out of seemingly unrelated material
3. A way of analyzing qualitative information
4. A way of *systematically observing* a person, an interaction, a group, a situation, and organization, or a culture

5. A way of *converting* qualitative information into quantitative data (p. 5)

There are four learning stages in doing thematic analysis in a particular case:

1. *Sensing themes* – that is, recognizing the codable moment

2. *Doing it reliably* – that is, recognizing the codable moment and coding it consistently

3. *Developing codes*

4. *Interpreting the information and themes in the context of a theory or conceptual framework* – that is, contributing to the development of knowledge (p. 11)

A thematic code must capture the essence of what it describes. For that reason, good codes have structure:

1. A label (i.e., a name)

2. A definition of what the theme concerns (i.e., the characteristic or issue constituting the theme)

3. A description of how to know when the theme occurs (i.e., indicators on how to “flag” the theme)

4. A description of any qualifications or exclusions to the identification of the theme

5. Examples, both positive and negative, to eliminate possible confusion when looking for the theme (p. 31)
In the presentation of the results of qualitative analysis, Anfara, Brown, & Mangione (2002) advocated the use of tabular formats for making the data analysis transparent to the reader. A presentation that includes an illustration of the inductive processes of code mapping should demonstrate that qualitative analysis techniques are sufficiently rigorous to ensure trustworthiness of the data. This approach permits the triangulation of themes that emerge from interview, observation, and documentary data.

Analysis Procedures

I kept field notes while on campus for interviews and I again journalized my thoughts as I began to interpret the data printed on reams of paper. Using the transcribed interviews with supplements, I initially used SPSS Text Analysis to categorize responses to questions thematically. However, I came to believe that this particular software was intended mainly for sorting major themes into categories when a researcher has a large volume of text-based data and is looking for simple patterns and frequencies. My conclusion from the limited results generated was that SPSS Text Analysis doesn't really work all that well when the researcher is trying to discern complex concepts in a relatively small data set (Analysis Journal, 7/3/2006).

My next attempt to make sense of the data was to analyze responses to each question and to then apply that analysis to the research questions. However, some of the themes I wanted to use in analysis were contained in responses to a number of questions. Also, an interview participant would sometimes offer the best answer to an early question toward the end of the interview. After discussing it with a research and measurement consultant, I decided to analyze the research questions thematically, and then return to the
specific interview questions for answers to the more topical questions arising within the case. I then examined the intent of each interview question more carefully, yielding Table 6 below:

Table 6: Thematic Representation of Interview Questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interview Question Theme</th>
<th>Topical Issue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>01. Participation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>02. Learning Goals</td>
<td>Are there goals for developmental education other than cognitive skills dictated by Florida state-mandated testing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>03. Learning about Teaching</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>04. Learning about Assessment</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>05. Professional Development</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>06. Assessment Role</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>07. Information Sharing</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>08. Developing Consensus</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>09. Engagement of Temporary Faculty</td>
<td>Do part-time/temporary faculty participate in outcomes assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. Use of Results</td>
<td>How might developmental educators improve their response to this accreditation requirement?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. Goal Achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. Other</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Something unexpected happened when I sat down the next day to work on the research. When I looked at the research questions and compared them to the information collected, I began to create categories as if I instinctively knew I needed each of those separate pieces of information to adequately answer the research questions. Each of these categories had specific qualifiers that distinguished one type of participation from another. As I began to code the interviews with these categories, I added others. When I finished coding all interviews, I realized that I had further fleshed out the categories for the last interviews coded and that I needed to go through the first ones again and recode.
When all interviews were coded, the completed code set looked like that shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Analytical Categories with Qualifiers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Qualifiers (assumed positive unless otherwise noted)</th>
<th>Coding Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A. Participation</td>
<td>Focus/intensity of participation in student learning outcomes assessment activities</td>
<td>Focus (name of course, department, program)</td>
<td>&quot;A-gen ed-low-nondev&quot; might describe a faculty member's participation in gen ed outcomes assessment (for example, a volunteer for the annual assessment week activities)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Extent/Level of involvement (low, moderate, high)</td>
<td>&quot;A-English-high-dev&quot; might describe the participation of an English department faculty member who has assumed leadership in department level assessment of developmental outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental/Non-developmental</td>
<td>&quot;A-QEP-moderate-dev&quot; might describe a QEP steering or subcommittee member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Example from interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B. Collaboration</td>
<td>Nature of collaboration with others on assessment activities</td>
<td>Member type (Faculty, faculty mentor, IE staff, Other staff, Administrators)</td>
<td>&quot;B-IE-Dev&quot; might describe a QEP committee member working with one or more IE staff members</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental/Non-developmental</td>
<td>&quot;B-Faculty-Nondev&quot; might describe a faculty member participating in a colloquium</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Example from interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C. Instrumentation</td>
<td>Role in creating, refining, and using a specific measurement tool</td>
<td>Creates, refines, or uses</td>
<td>&quot;C-Creates-Nondev&quot; might describe an outcome chair for the (general education) Learning Outcomes Assessment effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental/Non-developmental</td>
<td>&quot;C-Uses-Dev-Neg&quot; might describe a faculty member teaching a developmental course who administers assessment tools created by others and has had a negative experience with the process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Example from interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Qualifiers (assumed positive unless otherwise noted)</td>
<td>Coding Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D. Analytical Response</td>
<td>Role in interpreting, evaluating, and applying the results of outcomes assessment</td>
<td>Level of decision-making role: &quot;Low&quot; simply acknowledges the results of outcomes assessments, &quot;Moderate&quot; recommends changes to curriculum or instruction, and &quot;High&quot; implements and/or monitors such changes.</td>
<td>&quot;D-High-Dev&quot; might describe the chair of the English department who collaborated with faculty to determine why students were not succeeding, what could be done to improve instruction, and how to implement and monitor the changes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental/Non-developmental</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Example from interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E. Communication</td>
<td>Role in communication with regard to student learning outcomes assessment</td>
<td>Receives/initiates</td>
<td>&quot;E-Receives-Faculty&quot; might describe a faculty member who receives communication about outcomes assessment from another faculty member</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Focus level (faculty, faculty mentor, department, committee, program, institution)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Example from interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F. Reflexivity</td>
<td>Perceived importance of reflective practice</td>
<td>Importance (Low, moderate, high)</td>
<td>&quot;F-Low&quot; might describe a participant who has not mentioned or alluded to reflection as an element of a continuous improvement process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Example from interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G. Development</td>
<td>Focus of professional development</td>
<td>Time frame (Past, present, future)</td>
<td>&quot;G-Past-Participant-Dev&quot; might refer to professional development (to enhance students' developmental outcomes) undertaken prior to the QEP initiative</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Leader/Participant</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental/Non-developmental</td>
<td>&quot;G-Future-Participant-Nondev&quot; might refer to professional development the participant wishes to undertake in the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Example from interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H. Education</td>
<td>Focus of educational background</td>
<td>Major (e.g., Counseling, Measurement, English, Reading)</td>
<td>&quot;H-Counseling&quot; might refer to a faculty member with a Master's degree in Counseling</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Example from interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Category</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>Qualifiers (assumed positive unless otherwise noted)</td>
<td>Coding Examples</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------</td>
<td>-----------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I. Experience</td>
<td>Teaching experience</td>
<td>Years</td>
<td>&quot;I-5-dev&quot; might refer to a faculty member who has taught developmental courses for 5 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental/Non-developmental</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td>Example from interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>J. Barriers-Gateways</td>
<td>Perceived barriers stand in the way of collaboration or student success; perceived gateways facilitate these processes.</td>
<td>Barrier/Gateway</td>
<td>&quot;J-Barrier-Collaboration-Language&quot; might refer to a perceived language barrier needing to be overcome in an effort to effectively collaborate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Type (collaboration or student success)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Description of barrier or gateway</td>
<td>&quot;J-Gateway-Collaboration-Colloquium&quot; might refer to an opportunity for information sharing embedded in organizational culture</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Developmental/Non-developmental</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>K. Integration</td>
<td>Integration with organizational resources</td>
<td>Horizontal/Vertical</td>
<td>&quot;K-Vert-Past-Financial-Absent&quot; might indicate that college financial resources were perceived to have been absent in the past</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Time frame (Past, present, future)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Type of resource</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L. Best Practice</td>
<td>Perceived best practice in improving student learning</td>
<td>Description</td>
<td>&quot;L-The QEP is the College's plan for college preparatory success: 'This seems to be a very solid response to SACS, and I'm proud of it.'&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M. Assessment Type</td>
<td>Type of assessment</td>
<td>ELT, Longitudinal, cognitive, affective</td>
<td>&quot;M-Longitudinal-Key variables in tracking student success were student persistence, degrees awarded, ethnicity, and age.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Context</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N. Authoritative Models</td>
<td>Authorities in teaching and learning</td>
<td>Name</td>
<td>&quot;N-John Roeuche&quot;</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Journal entries created during the data analysis process yielded insights into site-specific terms used at Sunshine State Community College to describe aspects of student learning outcomes assessment. These are documented in Table 8: Local Definitions of Planning and Assessment Processes and Documents in Chapter Four.

Ethics

A case study worker has an obligation to create a contract with the institution and the actors under study. Participants must receive information about the possible harm or inconvenience to them for their participation. Further, they have the right to review and comment upon the data collected (but not the right to change the conclusions of the research study). For example, in this study, each participant received a summary of the transcribed interview and asked to verify or correct its contents. All but one of 12 interview participants responded to this request. Appendices A, B, and C contain copies of the individual interview and focus group prospectus/consent and a brochure on the study used generate interest in participation. These documents contain the ethically required elements of human subject research protocol.

Because of the highly political nature of institutions under study, they always have the perfect right to anonymity. Pseudonyms and additional cover for the actors through the use of composite characters (Creswell, 1998, p.133) have been used in this case study to shield the identity of individuals. Also, position titles have been changed to maintain the functional areas they represent, but prevent readers from identifying individuals. Similarly, “Sunshine State Community College” is a pseudonym for the real college.
Reliability and Validity: Ensuring Trustworthiness of the Data

Verification and validation are about ensuring the truthfulness of the research. In that sense, validation does more than ensure quality; it binds the researcher into an ethical contract with those in the field. Whereas in quantitative research designs (i.e., surveys) there is a wall between ideas and action, in case study research, the wall between ideas and action is porous. Thus, in this very personal form of study, the researcher reveals sources of personal bias so that the reader can form his or her own conclusions about the results (Bartlett, 2005). For example, I worked as an adjunct instructor for two years prior to my current position. Through teaching, I gained a perspective on instruction within a business and technology classroom. While my 10 years of more recent experience as an institutional researcher may bias my views toward the IR perspective, I have been studying student learning outcomes assessment as a component of my current doctoral studies in Curriculum and Instruction since 2001. Although I have a broad perspective on this topic, to mitigate personal bias in analyzing and interpreting the data from this case, I maintained a daily journal of reflections upon the research in progress while in the field and then again while undertaking the data analysis. This journal has become an artifact of the study. I have also verified interview data by asking participants to verify the truthfulness of my impressions.

In drawing conclusions about the research questions, I have examined evidence from multiple sources: surveys, reports, documents, observations, interviews, and personal reflection. The boundaries of this particular case and the authenticity of experience may or may not permit the reader to make “naturalistic generalizations”
(Stake, 1995, p. 86) concerning the applicability of aspects of the case to his or her own college.

Summary

In short, this study has used qualitative methods within a case study model to examine the institutional context, processes, and change strategies employed by faculty and assessment professionals in assessing student learning outcomes in developmental reading and writing. Multiple sources of data collected through an ethically sound process have been used to examine the context in which these professionals work to improve student success.

In the next two chapters, I will present findings (Chapter Four) and interpret these findings (Chapter Five). In particular, in Chapter Five, I will present the conclusions of this research and discuss the implications for the theories underpinning community college learning outcomes assessment, implications for the practice of assessment in a community college developmental education program, and implications for further research.
Chapter Four

Results

This chapter presents the findings of the study. Chronological and thematic analyses of the case data have provided insights into the research questions, topical issues, and the development of the College’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), an essential component of the College’s regional accreditation process. The six sections described below comprise the contents of this chapter.

I. Synopsis of Findings contains a brief digest of findings, both research and topical.

II. An Introduction to the Actors briefly describes faculty and assessment professionals (identified by pseudonym) who shared their experiences in personal interviews with this researcher and identifies their orientation toward assessment.

III. A Brief Timeline for the Development of the College’s Learning Improvement Focus summarizes the sequence of events leading up to the approval of the QEP. The purpose of presenting this timeline is to help the reader put the QEP development process into a larger framework. In this framework, developmental education provides a pathway to the achievement of student learning outcomes expected of all graduating students (general education outcomes).

IV. Findings on Research Questions provides detailed findings on the main issues (research questions) in the study. These findings include data from thematic
analyses of interviews and quotations from faculty and staff members that support these findings.

V. *Findings on Topical Issues* provides background information from the analysis of three specific interview questions that help the reader to understand the interplay of research issues.

VI. *Chapter Four Summary* is a point by point summary of the eight research and three topical questions answered through this study.

I. Synopsis of Findings

Findings of the research questions, the instrumental issues within the case, describe the community in which full-time faculty connected with others, including part-time faculty, instructional administrators, student services staff, and assessment professionals. Supplementing research findings, topical findings provide background information that help in understanding the interplay of research issues. Topical findings include issues such as faculty and staff goals for developmental education, the participation of part-time faculty in assessment, and how the College could more effectively use the results of assessment for improvement. While this section presents only a brief synopsis of the research findings, details (including comments from faculty and assessment professionals) may be found in the third section of this chapter, “IV. Findings on Research Questions.” Likewise, detailed findings on the topical issues may be found in the fourth section of this chapter, “V Findings on Topical Issues.”

*Synopsis of Research Findings.* Dimensions of professional preparation and experience included professional development, experience, and subject and level of
educational degree. Most assessment professionals had teaching experience and a variety of educational backgrounds. Their level of education tended to be higher than that of faculty. Faculty members, likewise, brought a variety of experiences to teaching, including coaching and counseling. Faculty members were actively engaged in developing their measurement and teaching and learning expertise, as evidenced by their past, present, and future references to professional development in interviews. Assessment professionals, on the other hand, tended to speak of professional development in the past tense, as if most of their learning had already occurred.

Aspects of the assessment role were communication, participation, and instrumentation. While faculty members referred to occasions when they received assessment communication, assessment professionals assumed a much more proactive role, both receiving and initiating assessment communication. Further, the participation of an assessment professional was qualitatively different than that of a faculty member. Faculty members focused the discussion upon the outcome they would like to achieve for the student. Assessment professionals, on the other hand, reframed the outcome in a way that was credible to faculty and measurable in terms of student response. Assessment professionals thus combined their expertise in research design with faculty curriculum expertise to customize a measure (or measures) for a particular outcome.

Continuous transformation of the organizational structure to accommodate tasks to be accomplished, activities involving individual and group reflection, and occasions for the celebration of college successes created the common ground for faculty and assessment professionals to work together on assessment plans toward the improvement of developmental education. The multiple structures, both vertical (steering) and
horizontal (coordinating), made widespread inclusion and participation possible. The QEP Committee was designed with a porous boundary. This enabled official members of the Committee to bring other faculty and staff into dialog when appropriate.

Themes that explained estrangement between faculty members and assessment professionals included academic structure, gateways and barriers to collaboration, and collaboration partners. While organizational structure served as a barrier to participation and communication in some cases, it became a gateway in others. The formal structure of the academic leadership team, for example, served as a gateway for communication within academic affairs, but served as a barrier to direct communication with assessment professionals for most faculty members. In developing the QEP, however, the College tailored its structure to the tasks at hand, facilitating collaboration in three distinct phases of development. The College also used structure to form a gateway by creating common ground for collaboration, thus becoming a "community of practice" (Wenger et al, 2002, p.1). This occurred by structuring deliberate activities over a number of years (i.e., an annual learning theme) that made possible both thoughtful reflection about the college’s vision statement and the celebration of that vision. With faculty and staff members thus joining in college-wide learning activities, the habit of collaborating in smaller groups for learning assessment could eventually become a more routine practice through structured interactions between faculty and institutional research staff.

A concept that developed in the analysis of this study was “analytical response.” The concept was defined as the role one plays in interpreting, evaluating, and using the results of outcomes assessment. A low analytical response would be to acknowledge the results of outcomes assessment. Faculty and staff members discussing the results of
outcomes assessment at a college-wide meeting would provide an example of low analytical response. A moderate level of analytical response would be to recommend changes to curriculum and instruction based upon the results. An example of this would be an instructional administrator making plans to change instructional strategies. However, a high level of analytical response would be to implement and monitor such changes. An example of this would be the decision of the QEP Committee to implement a learning community model as one strategy to improve student success.

While assessment professionals acknowledged or recommended changes to instruction based upon the results of outcomes assessment, academic leadership and faculty members implemented and monitored changes indicated with the resources (e.g., time, money, leadership) provided by College administrators. Thus, faculty and assessment professionals parted company in the decision-making role within the student learning outcomes assessment process. The QEP structure in which the IR officer was defined as a staff resource, rather than a member exemplified this division of labor. This meant that the measurement expertise of assessment professionals was often not heard in conversations about implementing changes to instruction at the course level.

While all interview participants exhibited characteristics of reflexivity and a desire to learn about both teaching and learning and measurement, there was little evidence that the roles of faculty members and assessment professionals were merging. For example, the decision-making and implementation role of academic affairs in outcomes assessment was to refine criteria for determining a students’ level of proficiency in a faculty-defined competency. However, without good instruments for authentic assessment, the outcomes assessment process would be limited to measuring
proxies for learning like grades. Assessment professionals helped faculty by framing the research questions in a measurable way. The process often involved a certain amount of struggle to communicate with faculty on outcomes. Assessment professionals facilitated and coordinated the logistics of the assessment process and provided an interpretation of the results (Learning Outcomes Assessment Task Force Report).

Synopsis of Topical Issues. Topical issues were secondary issues that provided background information to help in understanding the interplay of instrumental issues (research questions). This section contains a summary of responses to individual interview questions 2, 9, and 10. The “Findings from Topical Issues” section of this chapter is devoted to a description of these background issues in the case. Issues included:

1. specific goals of developmental education (individual interview question 2),
2. the participation of part-time faculty in student learning outcomes assessment (individual interview question 9), and
3. methods of using the results of learning outcomes assessment toward improving developmental education (individual interview question 10).

The first issue, developmental education goals above and beyond Florida mandated exit testing included the general education outcome “self-direction,” student affective development (i.e., motivation), and success at the next level. The second issue, participation in student learning outcomes assessment among part-time faculty was limited to only a handful, typically those with an interest in curriculum governance and time to spend on campus during the day. The limited participation of part-time faculty in curriculum development has been problematic for curriculum development, especially in
curricular pockets where part-timers have predominated. The third issue, obtaining more useful results from student learning outcomes assessment means that developmental educators should start with research-proven instructional strategies for specific populations of students, take more time to focus and reflect upon assessment results to achieve discipline-specific application to curriculum, and develop measurement habits within their communities of practice.

Following these brief glimpses of research and topical findings, the next section of this chapter provides a profile of the participants in this study.

II. An Introduction to the Actors

This section of Chapter Four introduces eight faculty, an instructional administrator, and three assessment professionals at Sunshine State Community College who were interviewed for this study. It also classifies them according to the strength of the evidence each provided in support of assessment collaboration.

Faculty members brought an assortment of perspectives to the process of collaborating on outcomes. The least involved in collaboration were the two part-time temporary faculty members, Philip and Maida. Other faculty such as Terri and Mary were full-time, but had only superficial involvement with collaborative activities. The most involved faculty members were Beth, Dina, Geri, and Fred. All four had many years of experience teaching at Sunshine State Community College and spoke on matters of outcomes assessment from an insider’s perspective. It is these four faculty members whose voices speak most forcefully within the findings documented in this chapter.
As part-time faculty members, both Philip and Maida were hired to teach classes on a one-semester contract. Philip was eager to put his experience to work in his classroom at Sunshine State Community College. He talked about ways to motivate students to read and to gauge their progress through assessment. However, Philip didn’t have a way to meet other faculty or staff members with whom he could share his ideas. Maida was in a similar situation. Although a part-time temporary faculty member, she appeared to be invested in her work teaching reading and writing courses and was eager to talk about her experiences with classroom assessment. She had volunteered to be interviewed for this research in anticipation of her interview summary, which she enthusiastically endorsed. Alas, she could provide no information on collaboration, either with faculty or with assessment professionals, as the following passage reveals:

'I, as a reading specialist have recommended unofficially that they should carry out what I call a needs assessment. A needs assessment being that they have to first of all figure out what the people we are bringing in, what are their scores, what do they look like, how well are they performing in reading and writing based on their FCAT scores, SAT, or whatever scores they have coming in. I would have driven their decision making process to know what exactly they are planning on, what skills are needed to be used on these students and who are the teachers they have to hire. But beyond that departmental level, since I’m not really a member of any of these committees that determine what happens, I don’t know what they are doing. (Interview with Maida)
Both Maida and Philip were trying to use their experience and knowledge to help students during the Spring term, but knew nothing about the large-scale QEP preparations to improve developmental education beginning in the Fall.

Unlike Philip and Maida, both Terri and Mary worked for the College full-time. Mary was another passionate professor, straddling a load of both prep and non-prep writing courses. She was eager to talk about her experiences implementing classroom and general education assessment, but did not say much about collaboration, either with other faculty members or with assessment professionals. The following passage reveals Mary’s orientation to collaboration on assessment:

Things have been done here a certain way here in the English department for a long time. There is one way that we share information that I didn’t mention to you. We on the Learning Outcomes Committee come back to the English department and share what we’re doing in the Committee. So that is one way we do communicate. And everybody’s been pretty upbeat about doing that, but you know, we really don’t talk a lot about assessment. (Interview with Mary)

Terri, on the other hand, had taught study skills courses for the students moving through a federally funded set of services for students who were first generation in college, disabled, or low-income. Terri had assisted the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) Director in the task of writing the final document, but was not a participant during the QEP implementation. When asked if she participated in outcomes assessment activities, Terri replied, “Honestly no, and I think that’s one of the issues in our SACS review…” Both Terri and Mary, however, provided some limited insights into outcomes assessment.
Beth, Dina, Geri, and Fred all had solid experience in collaborating with other faculty and with assessment professionals. At the time of our interview, Beth had been with the college for over 10 years. She was involved in every aspect of quality enhancement planning and general education assessment, from chairing committees to writing documents. Teaching was her great passion and she talked at length about the frustrations and successes of collaborating on, planning, and implementing assessment plans. Dina, on the other hand, was a well-respected faculty leader who had taught prep courses for nearly 30 years. Although she had not been able to participate in the QEP research and strategy formulation stages, she was fully invested in the implementation of the learning communities strategy for the improvement of college preparatory success.

Providing an outsider’s perspective on developmental education assessment, Geri was a very plain-spoken woman with a lot to say about the relevance of her experiences with coaching and counseling. She had been involved with faculty efforts to define general education outcomes and link them to specific courses. Also, while she had not been involved in the research and strategy formulation stages of the QEP, she was very involved with the development and implementation of a common course syllabus for the study skills course. Although she had little professional preparation in outcomes assessment, it seemed as if Geri’s experience had given her an intuitive feel for the authentic assessment of study skills competencies. Her job within the QEP was coordinating the group of faculty and student services staff responsible for the effort to get more prep students into study skills courses.

Fred was the most qualified of any of the faculty interviewed to discuss the evolution of collaborative assessment within developmental education at the College.
Fred was a veteran of the prep writing classroom. He had initiated the collaboration between institutional research and developmental education by requesting student success data from a longitudinal tracking system. As he related this lifetime of experiences, the hour was sometimes filled with angst from past experiences without sufficient resources to help the vast herds of students moving through prep reading and writing courses. As a state-wide leader of developmental education, he had been well aware of successful strategies other colleges were using. At other times during the interview, he expressed great satisfaction with the fruits of the QEP collaborations, as if the trajectory of his career had destined him to be there just at the right moment to help the group forge a winning plan:

The challenge is to get everyone on the same base and then have either direct resources or shared resources to be able to get it done. Any point you take away any of the shared resources, the program will not be as successful. And what I really enjoyed with the QEP process here, was the give and take of the administration. They recognized that they were actually ready to make some changes. (Interview with Fred)

Michelle was the Dean of the Associate in Arts program. She was very involved in shaping discussions about general education outcomes. She also led faculty members toward a discourse on the appropriate responsibilities and roles of the faculty including “teaching, professional development, college service, service to students and public service” (Faculty Position Description). Faculty consensus on responsibilities and roles ultimately became the core of a single position description for all faculty members at this non-union College. Michelle was also a member of the QEP and had previously taught
prep math and study skills courses. She was touched that the faculty as a whole recognized developmental education as the learning area they would most like to focus upon in the QEP:

I’ve been around for a while and been in the field, there are so many new people that have not, and seeing everyone across the campus come together and saying, you know what? This is a population of students that we really need to spend some time and focus on. I think that was the best thing that came out of the whole process. (Interview with Michelle)

The final group of interviewees was the assessment professionals. All three (Carolyn, Jeff, and Joe) talked about their wealth of experience collaborating on developmental outcomes assessment. Carolyn’s particular area of expertise was adult education. While she had previously taught prep reading courses, Carolyn’s role as an assessment professional was to direct the QEP through its research and strategy formulation phases. She shared the group’s exploration of best practices literature in developmental education and facilitated their often contentious strategy negotiations with College administrators. The culmination of these efforts was a plan that was approved by SACS.

Jeff had just completed some consulting work for the college when Academic Affairs needed a facilitator for a pilot of the general education outcomes assessment plan developed by faculty. Jeff was well-liked by faculty and the role turned into a job as Assessment Coordinator, reporting to the Director of Institutional Research. Jeff was also
responsible for carrying out QEP assessments. When asked if he had learned anything new in the last year about planning for learning outcomes assessment, he replied:

Yes, definitely. The QEP evaluators who came on-site were informative and shared some good insight. We could sit here and read books and attend conferences, but not until you have people who are practitioners who have had success in their college programs do you really have some input that you can also use in that perspective. (Interview with Jeff)

Joe had taught business and computer science courses before becoming an institutional researcher. Ultimately, he became Director of Institutional Research at Sunshine State Community College, serving as SACS liaison for the College’s recent re-affirmation of accreditation. After a number of years as an assessment professional, he was recognized by a Florida-wide research group for his innovative use of longitudinal tracking, having collaborated with Fred and other faculty to enhance college prep students’ success.

During discussions about assessment, this researcher became aware of some unique definitions of assessment related terms used locally by faculty and staff. These terms and their definitions are shown in Table 8.

Table 8: Local Definitions of Planning and Assessment Processes and Documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Strategic Imperatives</td>
<td>Goals that span more than one year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colloquium</td>
<td>A full faculty meeting that takes place during Professional Development (planning) days, usually in the afternoon following a college-wide assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Learning Outcomes</td>
<td>Work of the faculty and Institutional Effectiveness staff toward developing learning outcomes, rubrics, and measures for general education effectiveness. (Also referred to as the Learning Outcomes Assessment Task Force (LOATF) by administrators)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The collective voices of eight faculty, their academic leader, and three assessment professionals have provided evidence in support of a chronology of events beginning with the college’s exploration of learning outcomes and assessment and ending with the approval of the Quality Enhancement Plan.

III. A Brief Timeline for the Genesis of the College’s Learning Improvement Focus

In 1996, the President began college-wide discussions on mission and vision. A year later, the College adopted the current vision statement emphasizing shared values, openness, and inclusion. In 1998, faculty focus groups at an annual meeting agreed that the college did not have clearly enunciated outcomes for students (The Institutional Learning Outcomes Process). A small group of faculty members then went to work on this newly defined task. They began by formulating an initial set of general education outcomes and distributed readings to college-wide faculty about the learning outcomes assessment process. Faculty members were then asked to complete the Angelo & Cross (1993) Teaching Goals Inventory. The ensuing faculty-wide discussions about assessment broadened to other constituents, such as students. The goal “self-direction,” suggested by students, has since become a highly valued competency by faculty and students alike. By 2001, faculty members received the set of six approved general education outcomes and were asked to associate them with specific courses. The resulting document became known as the “matrix.” Meanwhile, discussions about teaching goals had resulted in a single college-wide position description for faculty. It described the five
major faculty roles and responsibilities: teaching, professional development, college service, service to students, and public service (Faculty Handbook).

In Fall 2002, the college began to study themes embedded in the College vision statement, one each year. Each theme was tied to the College’s vision of how it would serve society at large and provided food for thought for faculty, staff, and students through classroom-based study, guest speakers, and college-wide activities. About this time, faculty members began to take more of an interest in reviewing institutional research reports on student success measures. Joe, the Director of Institutional Research started to work with Fred, a faculty member, to examine data from a consultant-written longitudinal tracking system. The system tracked the progress of students who had started in college preparatory reading and writing for eight semesters to determine their enrollment, grades, and degree completion success by various demographics (Longitudinal Tracking System). This cohesive group of faculty members was taken aback by the failure of so many students to pass through prep and into credit-level courses successfully. They designed and implemented a number of instructional strategies in 2002 and 2003. Fred, the faculty member who worked with Joe (Director of Institutional Research) on longitudinal tracking measures, had this to say about early efforts to improve developmental writing:

I contacted [Joe] and said we need some measures, I prefer longitudinal measures for developmental students. That’s where it began. The lady who had already supplied a program to a couple of colleges [provided us with a consultant-written system to do longitudinal tracking]. And we used that to begin tracking basically persisters/ nonpersisters. At
that point I went to the department and said we are graduating under the state average. We have to put together a program [to improve student success].

After implementing the Longitudinal Tracking System, Fred and Joe collaborated on the interpretation of results from the system. Then Fred went to the faculty in the department to formulate instructional improvement strategies:

The initial assessment of six semesters for one cohort produced an awareness in the department that we were not retaining these students. Since our developmental program led into ENC1101, one of our measures of persister/ non-persister success was success in ENC1101 (English Composition I). Faculty learned that students weren’t succeeding – what could we do? At that point we began to put in place some collaborative learning- I was one of the first to go. We then put in place through departmental suggestions in minutes, a minimum number of activities. It was very basic to begin with. It started with a unified syllabus for this particular course so that everyone is on the same page. It let to a small workshop in which we called in not only the permanent teachers but the adjuncts. We said, “Can we all get together on the syllabus, on the nature of the non-punitive grading system?” Now we always had the A, B, C, N grades. The definition of the “N” grade and how it was actually calibrated had to be agreed among the teachers. Then within the courses themselves, we went to test-retesting for competency purposes while retaining the CLAST-style essay. We also adopted a paragraph/CLAST style final for
the first level/second with blind grading and training for the faculty in the six points – standard stuff. I watered it down, but we did simplify it for college prep level II and then really simplified it for level I, paragraph.

After developmental writing faculty had already implemented some changes to instruction, Joe provided Fred more specific information on the success of students they had been tracking. They found that they lost about half of their students the term after completing college level writing. While strong departmental leadership allowed faculty to put a number of promising changes into effect, they found that the limited time they had to devote to maintaining these interventions was ultimately not enough to impact student success in the long-run.

The Institutional Research Office kicked off 2004 with a publication that compared the college’s performance to Florida-wide student performance on accountability measures and grades in specific courses (What We Know About Student Learning). Several of these measures were focused upon college prep success. Later that year, faculty identified college preparatory education as the focus of the college’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and other constituent groups affirmed this choice. The QEP steering committee began to study best practices in developmental education. Later in the Fall, information from faculty focus groups was triangulated with assessments of program deficiencies and developmental education best practices to determine which practices needed to be enhanced.

In Spring 2005, college-wide communications such as the campus newsletter discussed what had been learned during the research phase. The Strategies and Initiatives team in the second phase then collaborated on strategies to improve college preparatory
education over a period of five years. Final strategies, including a new organization and associate dean for college prep were negotiated with college administrators. The QEP team adopted longitudinal tracking of students as one of the college’s summative assessment measures. In 2006, after approval of the plan by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), teams from the College Prep Coordinating Committee began to iron out the details of intervention strategies, scheduled to begin in the Fall.

The chronology of events from the college’s exploration of learning outcomes and assessment to the approval of the Quality Enhancement Plan showed the importance of the college’s foundational work in developing student learning outcomes. These findings have been combined and triangulated with documents, where available.

IV. Findings on Research Questions

Thematic analyses of interview data and documents have provided evidence to address each of the eight research questions, the instrumental issues of this case study. This researcher designed the individual interview questions to get college faculty and staff members to talk about their orientation to assessment as a tool for improving teaching and learning, to judge whether or not they had sufficient preparation for the task going in, how they had grown professionally (and in what ways), what the process looked like, what role(s) they played in making it work, and whether they felt as though it had made a difference for students.

By examining their responses to these questions, this researcher was able to probe the “assessment” intersection between the roles of faculty and assessment professionals. None of these individuals alone seemed to have a complete picture of what “assessment”
at the college looked like. Each one seemed to have a unique window into the process. The purpose of conducting this case study was then to develop the larger picture by fitting these individual views together.

Research Question 1

How is the professional preparation and educational background of a developmental education faculty member like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?

Dimensions of this issue included experience, professional development, and educational degree and level. These dimensions are discussed in detail in the paragraphs and tables that follow this introduction. Most of the assessment professionals had teaching experience and a variety of educational backgrounds. Their level of education tended to be higher than that of faculty. For example, all assessment professional interviewed had doctorates. Faculty members, likewise, brought a variety of experiences to teaching, including coaching and counseling. They were actively engaged in developing their measurement and teaching and learning expertise, as evidenced by their past, present, and future references to development in interviews. Assessment professionals, on the other hand, tended to speak of professional development in the past tense.

Experience. Faculty who participated in interviews for this case study brought a wide variety of experiences with them. Those included K-12 education, counseling, developmental and non-developmental teaching, and coaching. Although one faculty
member had little formal training in assessment, she seemed to have an instinct for authentic assessment from her previous experience with students:

   Every coach will tell you that they look for players that have whatever that coach calls it – the X-factor – that have self-discipline, that have self-motivation, that have organizational skills, that have leadership skills, all of the kind of – when you get down to it, nebulous areas. If those are important qualities to you, you have to find an objective way to evaluate them. You also have to find a way to teach them those skills.

   (Interview with Geri)

Counseling experience, according to Beth, allowed her to look at students holistically. This view of the student helped her to look for factors contributing to a student's failure or success to provide timely intervention, where needed. When asked if she had goals for developmental students other than test scores, she replied:

   It’s difficult for me to narrow it down just to academic terms. I look at the holistic picture, and look at changes not only in academic levels or changes in reading comprehension or vocabulary, but also looking at changes in attitudes, perceptions and behaviors. (Interview with Beth)

All but one of the three assessment professionals (Carolyn, Jeff, and Joe) interviewed had prior teaching experience, and Joe was looking forward to doing more teaching.

   Professional Development. Faculty and assessment professionals showed differences in their time orientation to development. While assessment professionals spoke almost exclusively of professional development as something that happened in the
past, faculty members had a variety of time orientations including past, present, and future, as exemplified in Beth’s discussion of professional development:

I think (in the future) maybe a crash course or review (not so much for me) in different types of assessment – qualitative vs. quantitative – just a bare bones review of those kinds of basic principles and concepts of assessments. Statistics is very helpful. (Interview with Beth)

One assessment professional (Jeff) explained that as the college had limited resources for professional development, the approach taken was to ensure that any expenditure enhanced valued skill and knowledge. For example, a lot of resources (especially time) had been invested in developing local instruments for general education outcomes assessment. This came from the desire to measure what students at the College received from their experience that could not be measured on nationally normed instruments. Faculty and staff members were thus actively seeking measurement skills through professional development opportunities to improve their approaches to assessment.

Education. While not all participants attributed their assessment expertise to educational background, some assessment professionals and faculty reported degrees in education. Likewise, both assessment professionals and faculty had masters or higher degrees in non-education fields like Business Administration or English. The main difference in educational background was level of education: faculty teaching college preparatory courses tended to hold master’s degrees; assessment professionals tended to hold doctorates. However, at least two faculty members indicated that they were working on doctorates.
While Research Question 1 was designed to determine similarities and differences in the professional preparation and educational background of faculty and assessment professionals, Research Question 2 was designed to elicit discussion of the roles played by each within the structure of their organization.

**Research Question 2**

How is the assessment role of a developmental education faculty member like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?

Aspects of the assessment role were communication, participation, and instrumentation. These dimensions are discussed in detail in the paragraphs and tables that follow this introduction. While faculty members referred to occasions when they *received* assessment communication, assessment professionals assumed a much more proactive role, both *receiving* and *initiating* assessment communication. Further, the participation of an assessment professional was qualitatively different than that of a faculty member. Faculty members focused the discussion upon the outcome they would like to achieve for the student. Assessment professionals, on the other hand, reframed the outcome in a way that was credible to faculty and measurable in terms of student response. Assessment professionals thus combined their expertise in research design with faculty curriculum expertise to customize a measure (or measures) for a particular outcome.

*Communication.* The communication role among assessment professionals was generally more proactive that that of faculty members regarding assessment. All assessment professionals interviewed indicated that they had initiated communication
within a learning outcomes assessment context. Five of eight faculty members (63%) did so. While the other faculty members were enthusiastic users of various classroom assessment techniques, they were either not presently teaching or were part-time faculty. However, all eight faculty members indicated a "receiving" role in communication about assessment. An example of faculty-initiated communication on assessment follows:

There are four or five of us who decided that if we were going to plan the learning communities model for this school, then we needed more information. We needed more guidance. So a couple of weeks ago, we had [a consultant] come in from a college in North Carolina. For two days we were prepared to explore the ideas of learning communities, to talk about in general what learning communities are, to talk about some models that are used at other institutions. We wanted to emerge from that meeting with our own model, which we have done. So that’s been my role. (Interview with Dina)

Dina was highly involved in not only bringing faculty and staff together from different parts of the college, but in conducting research and facilitating a consensus on a model for implementing a learning community at Sunshine State Community College.

*Participation.* Assessment professionals played a different participatory role than did faculty members. While it was the faculty role to determine which student outcomes constituted evidence of student success, it was the assessment professional's role to reframe the outcome in a measurable way. Toward that endeavor, the assessment professional provided a service for faculty, much like that of an attorney to a client. It
was the job of this professional to climb into the faculty mind set in order to tailor a measurement that fit both faculty and student comfortably.

Some faculty members, especially part-timers, however, did not participate at all in student learning outcomes assessment:

Groupings that pull everyone together to look at what has been working, that would be perfect. Because right now, they have done a wonderful job giving us opportunities for professional development, preparing us for the fact that we have to take responsibility for how these kids are learning, knowing what’s available out there, knowing what works and what doesn’t work. The instructor has to take the initiative, but at the same time there should be a collaborative effort, there should be a process whereby after they have given us the workshops, and what needs to be done. We should go beyond that level and we should come together and say what has been working best here. What strategies have you been employing? I should know what [another faculty member] is using when she’s teaching inferencing. I should know what strategy is working or how many students are responding to that. Right now I don’t have that information. (Interview with Maida)

While some faculty did not participate in assessment, other faculty played a role that was more akin to that of an assessment professional in terms of participation, communication, and involvement. For example, Geri talked about the roles of the members of her QEP subcommittee, composed mostly of student affairs staff members, in the following passage:
The [Student Learning Skills] subcommittee is a fairly small, cohesive subgroup. Our purpose was to enhance the enrollment. Of course our QEP is for the success of our prep students and this subcommittee is supposed to address the role of the course in that general purpose – to enhance what it does for students. Within that group it’s a mixture that is overwhelmingly student affairs folks. The chair of the committee is a counselor, the director of testing and assessment is on the committee, there’s an advisor on the committee, there’s the VP for student affairs, and the director of enrollment services. Then there’s myself, and the person under whom the preps and study skills fall. I think that if I could have changed the members of the committee, I would have put at least one more faculty member on there. I’m in an odd role, and I fall into an odd niche anyway. We don’t have that many people that have been both full-time faculty and full-time student affairs. (Interview with Geri)

Geri played the role of facilitator both within the committee among student affairs professionals and outside of it as she worked to bring other faculty together on the issue of a common course syllabus for study skills.

*Instrumentation.* While the assessment professionals and faculty member both had a stake in putting the right measurements in place, the impact upon students was felt more keenly by faculty members, who were closer to the "firing line." (Learning Outcomes Assessment Task Force Report). Geri indicated that what she had learned about planning for student learning outcomes assessment was that many of the college's general
education outcomes defined by faculty were difficult to measure. To explain this, she
drew an analogy to students who must choose a research topic for a class assignment:

I think I probably have a clearer idea of how those outcomes play a role with what I’m doing in the classroom. I think I’ve probably also learned that many of the outcomes are really difficult to measure. It’s so funny because we are struggling through our critical thinking unit in my study skills class. We went through this whole process of choosing topics and I kept asking them questions that I was hoping would lead them to an evaluation of the topics and a rejection of some that they’d picked. So they worked on them a little bit now and they’re hitting those roadblocks that are clearly out there. The other day I said well, you know, that’s really what I wanted you to learn: The secret to a lot of what you’re going to do in your classes to be successful is choosing the right topic. It’s not something necessarily you’re passionate about. It’s something that you can find good evidence for, you can research fairly easily, and has more than one point of view. Well, I think that I kind of relate that then to the learning outcomes. We’ve chosen all these learning outcomes. While we were doing it, were we really thinking about how are we going to measure these within the framework of what we do in the classroom? Some of them are very concrete and easy to measure and others are not. So that’s one thing I think I have learned about the assessment. So I’ve done like my students. I’ve chosen some that weren’t easy to assess. They are definitely important, but how do you measure them? (Interview with Geri)
Criteria for a good topic may include accessibility of research, a body of evidence, and more than one point of view. However, a student often chooses a favorite topic without thinking about how difficult it will be to complete an assignment on it. Similarly, the faculty may not have thought about how they would measure the outcomes they picked in the context of what they did in the classroom. Thus, an important way in which assessment professionals influenced the assessment process was by framing questions about instructional effectiveness in a measurable way by applying their expertise in research design.

While Research Question 2 discovered the differences and similarities in the roles played by faculty and assessment professionals, Research Question 3 sought to determine which strategies brought them together to work on assessment projects.

Research Question 3

Which collaborative strategies serve to create common ground for faculty members and assessment professionals to work together on assessment plans?

Continuous transformation of the organizational structure to accommodate tasks to be accomplished, gateways to collaboration, activities involving individual and group reflection, and occasions for the celebration of college successes created the common ground for faculty and assessment professionals to work together on assessment plans toward the improvement of developmental education. The multiple structures, both vertical (steering) and horizontal (coordinating), made widespread inclusion and participation possible. In Figures 2, 3, and 4 below, the QEP Committee is depicted as having a porous boundary. This enabled official members of the Committee to bring
other faculty and staff into dialog when appropriate. The structure promoted cross-functional dialog on issues affecting student success, often inviting the direct participation of institutional researchers.

*Structural Transformations in Three Phases of the QEP.* Phase I was characterized by a loose confederation of research groups with diverse memberships. The “main” committee, which performed a steering function for the activities of subcommittees, had representation from academic affairs (academic deans, learning resources, liberal arts & sciences, vocational programs, and academic support) and student services (enrollment, student support, testing and assessment, counseling & advising). Institutional Effectiveness staff and the VP for academic affairs were named resources and liaisons to the committee (QEP Committee Roster).

![Diagram](image)

*Figure 2: QEP Phase I – Research (Year 1: March-December)*
Phase II, which continued the Committee’s work into the second year, was characterized by increasingly specialized subcommittees, whose tasks were to identify funding sources (Resources), communicate news and events related to the QEP (Communications & Technology), develop formative and summative evaluation strategies (Assessment and Evaluation), and identify instructional strategies and interventions that would serve to improve college prep success (Strategies and Initiatives).

![Diagram showing the QEP Committee and its subcommittees: Resources, Communication and Technology, Assessment and Evaluation, Strategies and Initiatives, English/Reading, Math, Student Support.]

Figure 3: QEP Phase II – Develop Strategies (Year 2: January-October)

An emphasis upon horizontal integration in Phase III was exemplified by both the creation of the College Prep Coordinating Committee to oversee implementation and by the expected increase in participation of part-time faculty members. According to one
faculty member, while adjunct faculty members had had only minor involvement in
general education learning outcomes assessment up to this point, they would most likely
be involved with the implementation of QEP intervention strategies. This was because
the study skills and math prep courses, major targets of implementation strategies, were
largely taught by adjunct instructors. The Coordinating committee spanned prep
disciplines and student services, keeping a cross-section of the college continually talking
about college prep issues. Vertical integration in the implementation phase of the QEP
was accomplished mainly through the creation of the new position of associate dean for
the college prep program. This element of QEP strategy, rooted firmly in the
developmental education literature (Boylan, 2002), focused attention and College
resources on improving college prep. The faculty won a hard-fought battle to hire an
academic officer to lead college preparatory education, thus marshaling a champion to
their cause. The structural changes depicted in Figures 2, 3, and 4 were synthesized from
interviews and the QEP document and have been verified by the original QEP director.
Gateways to Collaboration. “Gateways” in this study are defined as organizational structures and processes that facilitate collaboration. While faculty and assessment professionals were just as likely to discuss collaboration, 21 faculty references to collaboration were about barriers (57%) and 16 were about gateways (43%). An example of a gateway to communication about assessment often cited by faculty was
the colloquium, a faculty meeting in which important topics impacting teaching and learning were discussed:

Every semester we have the faculty colloquium where all full-time faculty get together for meetings. And we’ve suggested that [at] every single faculty colloquium, we need to have a learning outcomes assessment update and we need to have a QEP update so it’s always visible and always there in front of faculty. We still have a lot of faculty that have no clue what the QEP is, they’ve heard of it, but they are really not sure what it is – “Oh, it’s just those prep students – it doesn’t involve us,” when it really is a college-wide initiative. (Interview with Beth)

The proportion of assessment professionals referencing barriers was just the reverse of faculty. There were only two references to barriers (33%), while there were four references to gateways to collaboration (67%) among assessment professionals. Thus, faculty tended to site the difficulties inherent in assessment collaboration, while assessment professionals more often referred to the ways in which it worked well.

Community Learning Activities. Another way in which the College created common ground for collaboration was through its efforts to become a "community of practice" (Wenger et al, 2002, p.1). This occurred by structuring deliberate activities over a number of years that made possible both thoughtful reflection about the college’s vision statement and the celebration of that vision.

A college-wide activity addressed one particular “theme” each year, for which there were common readings. The idea was for faculty to integrate that theme into as many classes as possible. A new theme was introduced to the college each Fall. Last
year’s theme was “Dignity,” and it was displayed prominently on vertically hanging banners along the winding campus road. Accompanying “Dignity” were the learning themes from the three previous years. The college has plans to continue reading and exploring new topics with students, faculty, and staff members. According to Joe:

Certainly if there’s a learning theme and all faculty and students have an opportunity to participate in (and many do), that helps build a community. (Interview with Joe)

*Celebration.* After an annual college-wide peer nomination process, a committee of peers chose the “best” nominee in each category to receive an award for reinforcing a set of common values among peers. There were awards for teams, as well as individually achieving faculty and staff members who had accomplished a goal of great strategic importance to the college that year. During the staging of these awards at the end of Spring term, each honoree received a small grant through a college endowment. An awards committee staged these prestigious awards as the culmination of a ceremony celebrating the individual and team contributions of faculty and staff members, including length of service awards and retiree recognitions. The staging for the peer awards was dramatic, heightening the anticipation of the announcement by darkening the room and playing spotlights on the audience in “search” of the winner. The winner’s family also enjoyed a place in the spotlight as photographers snapped pictures of the winners and their families. Commented Joe, “This is a recognition that people have put a lot of effort into things - their family contributes to that.”

The success of recognition programs like these counters the argument that strategy must always be rational and top-down. For example, Mintzberg (1989) proposed
his grassroots model of strategic planning to counter a philosophy of leadership that strategies must be carefully and deliberately cultivated by a careful leader. The grassroots model has elements that mirror Birnbaum’s (1988) organizational anarchy and Senge et al’s (1994) learning organization. Richard Voorhees, a past president of the Association for Institutional Research, may have been thinking of the grassroots model when he said that an alternative job of IR was to feed networks (2003), which then grow in unanticipated directions. Applicable principles of this model are:

- Strategies initially grow like weeds in a garden, they are not cultivated like tomatoes in a hothouse.
- These strategies can take root in all kinds of places, virtually anywhere people have the capacity to learn and the resources to support that capacity.
- Such strategies become organizational when they become collective, that is, when the patterns proliferate to pervade the behavior of the organization at large.(Mintzberg, 1989, p. 214-216)

This recognition program thus helped to solidify the messages to faculty and staff members college-wide that those who had a part to play in the college’s successes and that innovation and collaborative effort would be rewarded.

While Research Question 3 sought to determine organizational processes and structures that brought faculty and assessment professionals together in collaboration on assessment projects, Research Question 4 instead explored processes and structures that kept faculty and assessment professionals from successfully collaborating.
Research Question 4

Which strategies cause estrangement between faculty members and assessment professionals?

Themes that explained estrangement between faculty members and assessment professionals included academic structure, barriers to collaboration, and collaboration partners. These dimensions are discussed in detail in the paragraphs and tables that follow this introduction.

Academic Structure. Although the flexible structure of the QEP brought faculty and assessment professionals together into direct dialog, the hierarchy of management teams within academic affairs served as a filter for information flowing from institutional research. Without further examination, the horizontal and vertical lines of communication within the academic structure could be seen as a formula for engaging the academic community in dialog about student success. Information on the structure of communications channels within academic affairs came mainly from the single interview with an instructional administrator, Michelle. According to her, faculty received data on student success in a number of ways. First, administrators shared important findings with faculty directly though a colloquium each semester. Second, administrators shared data with the small group of direct reports in the division. In these meetings, information was used as a springboard for discussion about what could be done to improve areas that were troublesome. Third, administrators discussed data in weekly meetings of the Learning Management Team, “four deans, directors, kind of top-level management in instruction” who reported to the academic VP, said the Dean. Fourth and finally, administrators discussed data within the Learning Response Team. “We meet weekly with our VP of
[Academic Affairs], but quarterly, we have what we call our the learning response team and that includes all of our department chairs (we call them program facilitators), and that’s vocational programs, our workforce programs, continuing ed, so it’s about 30 or so folks that sit around a table. The management team helps to decide what things we want to bring to that group for discussion. Then information sharing, as well, but a lot of decisions are made through that group.”

The Dean described the process of information sharing as one in which Institutional Research communicated information to her directly. The information was then disseminated through the above-described information channels:

For the past three years we’ve done a really good job of sharing that information with everyone, but especially our learning management team. I get reports all the time that show how well our students are doing within our prep classes, what percentage of students are retained or successful or passing at that highest level in our prep classes, so I get to review that. Our [IR] office sends me an electronic copy and then I’ll also have a hard copy later. Other types of surveys on students, CCSSE, just all kinds of surveys that we do institutionally with students in different programs, that information’s always shared back with the learning management team. And then what I try to do is when I have my small group together, my division together, is making sure that they’re aware of it – seeing what’s going on, what the numbers look like. That generates discussion: “Ok, this is an area we’re not doing so well in, so what do we need to do? This is an area that we’re doing well, so how can we do even
better?” So I think just recently -- well, three years, we’ve done a much better job of getting that information out. We have faculty colloquiums each term and that information’s shared there, which is very positive because I think sometimes in some institutions that can be a disconnect.

(Interview with Michelle)

In this manner, the Learning Management Team decided what information to share and which decisions needed to be made within the quarterly meetings of the Learning Resource Team. Academic administrators thus filtered much of the information seen by the faculty though the organizational hierarchy. This lack of standing within academic affairs and inability to negotiate an agenda on standardizing course outcomes also hampered Institutional Research efforts to complete an effective assessment plan for general education outcomes, as Joe commented:

I would feel more comfortable if we also had more embedded assessment, that we saw that some of these outcomes identified in syllabi, that they identified how they were assessing them at the course level, and that there’d be some means of collecting [samples of student work]. Whether they were used for grading, that’s not important. It’s that we need that information in order to improve instruction. (Interview with Joe)

The restriction on information flow within the academic structure, however, did not occur in the ad hoc, ever-evolving QEP, in which the structure was innovated specifically to promote cross-functional dialog on issues affecting student success and which often invited the direct participation of institutional researchers. The elaborate structure of communications channels within academic affairs thus facilitated internal
decision-making and communication, but excluded institutional researchers from direct
dialogs with faculty on teaching and learning issues. The exceptions to this were
structures created for specific tasks such as general education assessment simply called
“learning outcomes” or the QEP, a plan to improve developmental education. In these
structures, assessment professionals worked with a limited group of faculty. Beth, a
veteran faculty member who had worked with institutional researchers staff on
assessment, had positive experiences working with these staff members:

With learning outcomes when things got a little rocky or whatever
our [institutional research] staff have been very helpful. They’ve been
very supportive and very open to helping to helping with problem solving
and working with us to help us to be as effective as we can. (Interview
with Beth)

While working relationships between faculty and assessment professionals were positive,
their daily work life kept them in separate environments with limited two-way
communication opportunities.

The QEP structure was linked to academic communications channels through
membership on the QEP steering committee (26 individuals) by some of the key people
in academic affairs (Dean of AA Programs, Dean of Library Services, program
facilitators, and faculty). Although fluid in its developmental stages, the QEP eventually
became anchored in the College organizational structure during the implementation stage
through the newly created position of Associate Dean of College Preparatory Programs
(reporting to the Dean of the Associate in Arts Program). The Office of Institutional
Research bore responsibility for conducting QEP assessments, thus periodically
measuring and reviewing the effectiveness of planned intervention strategies (such as learning communities).

_Barrriers to Collaboration._ “Barriers” in this study are defined as those structures and processes within the organization that obstruct collaboration. Faculty often cited “time” as a barrier to information sharing about the results of assessment. For example,

I didn’t realize it until you asked these questions, and I realized how little we share. It’s such a great question. It’s going to set into play some better ways that we can effectively communicate. We could do plenty of things. We could have informal meetings where we talk about this. We could have formal sessions where we hash out ideas, brainstorm ways to improve our assessment techniques. We really don’t do that, we really don’t. I think at the community college, you have to remember, we teach five. At the university level, you teach two. We teach five. And I think because of that, we don’t have as much time to share and to think. And I miss that. I don’t think at the community college level it’s as important, at least it doesn’t seem to be. (Interview with Mary)

The proportion of assessment professionals referencing barriers was just the reverse of faculty. There were only two references to barriers (33%), while there were four references to gateways to collaboration (67%) among assessment professionals. Thus, faculty tended to site the difficulties inherent in assessment collaboration, while assessment professionals more often referred to the ways in which it worked well.

_Collaboration Partners._ Because of the limited number of assessment professionals in proportion to faculty members, assessment professionals collaborated
with a greater mix of faculty, administrators, and staff than did faculty members. For example, while all three assessment professionals collaborated in mixed groups, only four out of eight faculty members interviewed (50%) collaborated in this manner. More faculty members tended to mention collaborations with other faculty, if they mentioned collaborating on assessment at all.

While Research Question 4 investigated the sources of estrangement that kept faculty and assessment professionals from collaborating on assessment, Research Question 5 sought to determine the role of assessment professionals in using assessment results for improvement.

Research Question 5

What role, if any, does an assessment professional play in determining how the results of student learning outcomes assessment will be used for improvement?

A concept that developed in the analysis of this study is “analytical response.” The concept is defined as the role one plays in interpreting, evaluating, and using the results of outcomes assessment. A low analytical response would be to acknowledge the results of outcomes assessment. An example of this would be faculty and staff members discussing the results of outcomes assessment at a college-wide meeting. A moderate level of analytical response would be to recommend changes to curriculum and instruction based upon the results of outcomes assessment. An example of this would be an instructional administrator making plans to change instructional strategies. However, a high level of analytical response would be to implement and monitor such changes. An example of this would be the decision of the QEP Committee to implement a learning
community model as one strategy to improve student success. Fred, the faculty member who worked with Joe to refine uses of the longitudinal tracking system, provided an excellent example of both the limited role of assessment professionals in effecting change in developmental education and the vexation of faculty members who had the authority, but not the resources to do so prior to the development of the QEP:

I contacted [Joe] and said we need some measures, I prefer longitudinal measures for developmental students. We’re not succeeding – what can we do? At that point we began to put in place some collaborative learning. We then put in place a minimum number of activities. It started with a unified syllabus for this particular course so that everyone is on the same page. It led to a small workshop in which we called in not only the permanent teachers but the adjuncts. We said “Can we all get together on the syllabus, on the nature of the non-punitive grading system?” We initially did achieve a higher retention rate with the next cohort, but since everyone was being asked, just to be honest, too many hats to wear, that faded in the English department. We did not have any unified developmental education program. (Interview with Fred)

While Joe provided the data, it was up to Fred to formulate and implement instructional strategies to the limit of the resources available to him. Thus, while assessment professionals acknowledged or recommended changes to instruction based upon the results of outcomes assessment, academic leaders and faculty members implemented and monitored changes indicated with the resources (e.g., time, money, leadership) provided by College administrators. Faculty and
assessment professionals thus parted company in the decision-making role within
the student learning outcomes assessment process. The QEP structure in which
the IR officer was defined as a staff resource, rather than a member exemplified
this division of labor.

While Research Question 5 sought to determine the role of an assessment
professional in using the results of assessment for improvement, Research Question 6
investigated whether faculty and assessment professionals have become more alike in
terms of their assessment roles since they began collaborating on assessment.

Research Question 6

Have faculty members at the college become more like assessment professionals
and assessment professionals more like faculty members in terms of their assessment
roles since they began collaborating on student learning outcomes assessment?

Both faculty members and assessment professionals alike greatly valued both
measurement expertise and reflexivity, the ability to reflect upon one’s practice.
Evidence of the capacity for self-reflection could be found in the generous responses to
the thought-provoking questions posed in individual and focus group interviews.
Participants really reached down to find answers to the questions posed by this researcher
in these interviews. Often a more complete answer to a previous question would emerge
in later conversation, after the participant had time to think about it.

Faculty talked about the desire to pursue professional development toward
increased expertise on measurement topics or emphasized how valuable their courses in
measurement were in developing assessment instruments. On the other hand, assessment
professionals, most of whom had significant teaching experience, talked about their studies of best practices in teaching and learning. Also, both assessment professionals and faculty members indicated a high degree of reflexivity, the tendency to reflect upon one’s actions for the purpose of learning from them. Virtually all indicated some amount of this characteristic in interviews.

For example, in the following passage, Fred assessed the need to change instructional strategies within the English department and the examined the reasons for the slow progress in making that change prior to the QEP:

The place where as a subcommittee I believe we were the weakest going in (again including myself) was in the level of assessment. I learned during the QEP process that what I had been using was OK, but that in fact, to go into particular programs, particular faculty, and say you need to change your teaching strategies and we need to be on the same page rather than trumpeting academic freedom. The literature reports are saying this over and over and over. It was during the QEP, we were talking back into our departments, and for the first time we had 85-90% cooperation from the faculty, and what they wanted to know, of course, on a political basis up front was “Is this the real thing?” “Is this serious?” But even that part of it came from their professionalism; part of it came from the fact that they didn’t want to be involved in a developmental program that was not successful. They just didn’t, and that came from the ongoing data that said you could be doing better than this. So they learned and I learned that we
were going to have to be even more cooperative within [our] teaching strategies. (Interview with Fred)

Joe, on the other hand, took a more institutional focus in his reflections, thinking back about the reasons why the faculty may have selected college preparatory education as the focus of the QEP:

The origin of that came about from a faculty colloquium when there was a general discussion, and I don’t know that it was so much the longitudinal tracking system that we did with [Fred], as it was a general awareness that we had a number of students at the college who were not ready to do college level work. Part of that is obvious from the number of students who are required to take college prep courses, but in addition to that was the feeling among some of the faculty that students who entered their courses were not ready for college level learning, whether it was the previous work with the learning outcomes “matrix” or the work of the communications faculty with the longitudinal tracking of students who successfully completed the college prep to see how they did. It wasn’t just the communications faculty or the math or those involved with college prep courses, but a general feeling that students needed more preparation to do college level learning. (Interview with Joe)

Although both faculty and assessment professionals shared a desire to improve their knowledge in teaching and learning and exhibited the ability to reflect upon the practice of assessment, there was little evidence that their roles were merging. For example, the decision-making and implementation role of academic affairs in outcomes
assessment was to refine criteria for determining a students’ level of proficiency in a faculty-defined competency. However, without good instruments for authentic assessment, the outcomes assessment process would be limited to measuring proxies for learning like grades. Assessment professionals helped faculty by framing the research questions in a measurable way. This process, however, was often consumed by the struggle to find common language to communicate about learning outcomes:

From a non-assessment side, it’s almost always a frustration (not a discomfort), but a frustration (in talking with assessment staff) because we think we’re measuring one thing, and they think they’re measuring another, and we don’t always communicate well. So even the development of the cohort for the QEP was PAINFUL, because we were hearing “Well, we can’t measure that” and we were saying “How can we not measure that – that’s what we have to measure.” And so frequently assessment and teaching don’t talk the same language, and so there’s lots of misunderstanding with that. It’s a lack of vocabulary. When I’m talking with other faculty members we’re usually talking the same vocabulary. It’s with measurement and assessment people that we’re usually talking a different language than they are.

[Differences] had to be negotiated. We had to make ourselves clearer, because assessment people come to us thinking we’re talking emotion and theory and they’re talking specific data. So we just have to keep defining for one another what we’re talking about. (Interview with Terri)
Other evidence of the different language used by faculty involved in general education outcomes assessment was the name each had for the group. While Jeff, the Assessment Coordinator, usually referred to the group as the “Learning Outcomes Assessment Task Force,” faculty members called it simply “Learning Outcomes,” as if the group and the task were the same.

Having overcome the language barriers to frame outcomes measurably, assessment professionals then facilitated and coordinated the logistics of the assessment process and provided an interpretation of the results (Learning Outcomes Assessment Task Force Report). However, it was subsequently the purview of academics to develop and implement changes to instructional strategies.

While Research Question 6 investigated whether or not faculty and assessment professionals had become more alike in their roles since they began collaborating on assessment, Research Question 7 sought to determine the qualitative differences or similarities in those roles, if any.

**Research Question 7**

If so, how have they become more alike?

In acquiring teaching and learning and measurement expertise, faculty and assessment professionals have been on similar professional development paths. Faculty members and assessment professionals mentioned similar types of professional development and training, both on- and off-campus. Faculty cited John Roeuche, Patricia Cross, Hunter Boylan, Trudy Banta, Peter Elbow (writing as a process of discovery), Jack Misero (transformative learning), Vincent Tinto, and Skip Downing as assessment experts.
whose advice they had sought. For example, Mary, a faculty member, talked about the way she had applied her professional development to improvements in classroom assessment:

I’ve improved my assessment tools. As teachers, you know we’re stuck with those two instruments “the essay and the multiple choice objective test.” But really, there are so many methods of evaluation and I’ve gone to portfolio assessment in almost all of my classes, including prep English, and the reason I do the portfolio assessment is I’ve read so much of Trudy Banta and other experts in that field who said portfolio is a wonderful way to go because of our holistic view of how a student’s doing, how well a student is progressing. (Interview with Mary)

Likewise, assessment professionals cited Bob McCabe (2003) and Bill Blank, a USF faculty member who had taught an on-campus professional development activity on contextual learning for college faculty and staff members. Joe talked about the lessons from that session he put to use in a class he taught part-time:

After I went to that little workshop, in the class that I taught this term (a computer applications class), I gave the students an alternative to the standard cases at the end of each chapter, [a chance] to come up with their own application. So, you (students) have to meet the objectives of this standard case, but come in with your own case.

I had a student who had a large paper route. He designed a spreadsheet application to help him analyze his profitability at different parts of the route. A student who’s on our tennis team did an Excel
application to look at tennis scores of the team. Anyway, they used this model that said, I can meet all the criteria of this standard case and come up with my own [case]. The other part is to have them share that with the class. I want to do that earlier in the term the next time I teach it, because then you start more of a group interchange. People figure, “Oh, this person does something, I can learn from them.” (Interview with Joe)

Thus, faculty and assessment professionals alike supplemented their core knowledge in student learning outcomes assessment with both measurement and teaching and learning expertise.

However, while knowledge of teaching and learning was essential to applying measurement expertise to learning problems, one of the limitations upon the analytical response of the Assessment Coordinator came from the dual roles demanded by Jeff’s job description:

MAJOR RESPONSIBILITY: To provide logistical and research/assessment support for the Quality Enhancement Project and the Learning Outcomes Project; to represent the college as its legislative liaison. (Assessment Coordinator Position Description)

His role as legislative liaison and other duties sometimes necessitated Jeff’s presence elsewhere, as indicated in conversation with Geri, a faculty member involved with the QEP implementation:

I don’t know that I’ve ever had call to discuss the results with [institutional research]. It’s usually in paper form or we get it in a faculty colloquium or something. Actually there is one person from institutional
[research] who is on our group. He hasn’t been there in several meetings.

He was given the dual responsibility for another campus for a while. The person in charge left for another job and so he had to wear two hats. Our hat kind of slipped off, so he hadn’t been in the meeting in a while.

(Interview with Geri)

Both his role as legislative liaison and as an interim campus director placed Jeff squarely in the role of administrator, sometimes in conflict with his role as a measurement consultant and manager of QEP assessments. Thus, while assessment professionals shared the same professional development interests as faculty, the differences in their assigned roles within the organizational structure caused them to place emphasis on different tasks, at times.

While Research Question 7 investigated the qualitative changes to faculty and assessment professionals since they began collaborating on assessment, Research Question 8 explored the perspectives of the interview participants in identifying the most promising assessment approaches.

Research Question 8

From the perspective of respondents, which assessment approaches have shown the most promising results?

Faculty and assessment professionals talked about collaborative processes that evolved out of their desire to help students succeed. The college’s crowning achievement was developing a Quality Enhancement Plan for the improvement of developmental education based upon best practices in the field. The details of these processes show the
way toward improving collaboration on the use of assessment results, not only for the improvement of developmental education, but for all outcomes assessment efforts at Sunshine State Community College. Faculty members and assessment professionals alike agreed that the QEP was an exemplary plan for college preparatory success. The process began with a complete literature review and incorporated many strategies that had been successful at other institutions. Scarcity of funding, however, necessitated compromises and the college could not afford everything QEP members wanted to do. However, the process that the college went through, building capacity linked to resources, was the way to make a successful program (Boylan, 2002). Remarked Fred, a veteran faculty member: “This seems to be a very solid response to SACS, and I’m proud of it.”

During the development of the plan, when faculty lacked understanding of the nature of the problem at hand, they spent time in professional development. They talked to experts in their fields, read books, attended seminars, and discussed what they had learned within their cross-functional groups. This initially occurred in the large QEP group assigned to research best practices in developmental education in Phase I of QEP development. After this faculty learning community had decided upon the best strategies the college could afford in Phase II, they created new learning groups in an effort to implement learning communities and to strengthen study skills courses in Phase III. Their success in moving these efforts forward came not only from their own abilities to reflect upon what they had learned, but from stretching this ability further to collaboratively reflect and decide upon courses of action that would work within the college’s fiscal constraints.
One example of a successful collaboration was the development of the college’s learning communities model. Dina led a small group of about five individuals in planning the model for the QEP. Because they needed more information, they brought in a consultant, a successful practitioner of the learning communities model from a college in North Carolina. They explored the various models used at other institutions that allowed students to take pairs of related courses within a cohort, and emerged from that meeting with their own learning community model. Dina also consulted with institutional research to select the population for the initial learning community cohort group. In this case, a practitioner was able to lend instructional expertise and institutional research was able to lend its data analysis know-how to make the effort work.

Occasionally, a faculty member played a role that was more akin to that of an assessment professional in terms of participation, communication, and involvement. For example, Geri talked about her role as a faculty facilitator among student services staff in enhancing enrollment in student learning skills courses, while simultaneously working with faculty to develop a common syllabus. Geri thus played an important role in leading these groups to consensus on important details of the QEP implementation.

*Well-Qualified Faculty.* Human resources provided at least one key to collaboration on improving developmental student success. According to the academic administrator interviewed, one of reasons reading and writing outcomes had improved over time was that the Communications department was comprised of an exceptionally well-qualified, cohesive group of faculty. According to Michelle, Dean of the AA Program:
From my perspective, when I look at the communications department, it’s a very cohesive group. The full-time faculty there really, really take ownership of the courses and they’re very responsible for getting part-time people that are teaching in their department. Very, very, very high expectations and standards for folks teaching in prep reading, definitely, and in the prep math. For instance, faculty who teach prep classes are only required by SACS to have a bachelors degree. Our prep reading and English folks tell me all the time if we can find that Master’s person for teaching prep reading/prep English, that’s what we want. And I would say they might have two people teaching prep classes that only have bachelor’s degrees and the rest have Master’s level. Very well-qualified. They come together with common syllabi. We know that faculty have academic freedom, but they make sure that they’re all on the same page with what the students are being exposed to in the classroom.

(Interview with Michelle)

Thus, one of the college's success strategies was to focus upon the quality of the faculty who teach developmental courses. According to Mary, who straddled both prep and non-prep courses, faculty who taught a mix of developmental and non-developmental courses had a better idea of what it took for that student to succeed in credit level courses. This group’s cohesiveness meant that when Fred asked them to make changes to instruction suggested by results of longitudinal tracking, faculty members were willing to put in the extra time and effort.
Assessment Support. The Community College Survey of Student Engagement (CCSSE) provided a means of assessing support for developmental learners and determining the success of the above-mentioned improvement strategies. Student attitudes toward the learning environment were periodically assessed through the CCSSE. The College has participated in the CCSSE since 2002, benchmarking student support, student-faculty interaction, student effort, academic challenge, and active and collaborative learning against itself and against state and national scores. The Office of Institutional Research analyzed and distributed CCSSE data, linking it with the success of college prep reading and writing students (Longitudinal Tracking System) in partnership with faculty members teaching developmental courses. Longitudinal tracking was incorporated into QEP assessment methods, as well as assessments of outcomes of developmental learning by intervention strategy (such as learning communities). The Assessment Coordinator (in the Office of Institutional Research) was responsible for coordinating these assessment efforts (Position Description).

However, faculty members reported a fragmented view of the college’s assessment efforts. By examining their responses to individual interview questions, this researcher was able to probe the “assessment” intersection between the roles of faculty and assessment professionals. Analysis of the data showed that none of these individuals alone seemed to have a complete picture of what “assessment” at the college looked like. Each one seemed to have a unique window into the process, although a couple of veteran faculty members had a larger view than others. Mary, for example, regularly used assessment to inform her teaching, but indicated that faculty rarely spoke to one another about assessment. While she had been highly involved in general education outcomes
assessment and taught some prep classes, she was less informed about the details of the QEP development and implementation.

While this section, “Findings on Research Questions,” sought answers to the research issues of the case, the next section presents findings related to topical issues, secondary issues that bear a relationship to major findings of the study.

V. Findings on Topical Issues

While the previous section discussed the primary research questions or “issues” of this case study, the following section will elaborate upon “topical” findings, relating information that provides background and context for greater understanding of the findings of research questions. These findings came from analyses of interview questions 2, 9, and 10, and were corroborated with documents, where applicable.

Interview Question 2 (Goal)

Are there goals for developmental education other than cognitive skills dictated by Florida state-mandated testing?

In addition to passing Florida-required exit exams, interview participants mentioned developmental education goals such as the general education outcome “self-direction,” student affective development (i.e., motivation), and success at the next level. These themes are discussed in detail in the paragraphs that follow this introduction.

Self-direction. Maida’s view of how to define student success began with student-defined goals. She explained that when students arrived at college, they had vaguely defined goals. However, as a faculty member, she could help students to more clearly
define and focus upon their goals so they knew where they are going and what it would take to get there. The diagnostic tests administered at the beginning of the term allowed students to know where they were on that pathway to success.

Thus, while there were no standardized tests for measuring the outcomes of study skills courses, the group of faculty developing the curriculum for the course was studying outcomes as they related to students’ long-term success. The goal of this process was to ensure that each of those critical elements was included in each study skills course taught. Geri, a study skills faculty member, used an on-line assessment by Skip Downing, which gave helpful feedback to students as they looked at their own performance. Students would try to identify where they were, figure out where they ought to be, and determine why they were not there. The self-assessment addressed things like responsibility, inner motivation, and organization. Students received a score, upon which they could then reflect. This ability to self-monitor behavior that led to success was one aspect of the general education outcome “self-direction” (Learning Outcomes Report, 2004-2005).

The outcomes and assessments in Geri’s study skills course took an authentic form. For example, instead of teaching students about note taking by having them memorize guidelines for taking good notes, she assigned them the task of taking notes in another class. A description of her approach to authentic assessment follows:

I don’t want them to memorize from me what’s a good format for note-taking. Instead, their assignment will be, take notes in your other class and bring them in and let me see it. If they do that and if I can see that they’ve applied that, then they’ve done well. If they bring in something that nowhere resembles anything that anybody could study I
give it back to them and I have them revisit that unit and redo that again.

We just keep hammering away at it. That’s a luxury though, because I
only have 15 students in that class. I don’t know if I could do that if I had
30. I think that one of the keys for me to be able to do those kinds of
applied things is because it’s a small class. I had that luxury, and I could
afford to grade things three times. (Interview with Geri)

Geri also used this approach to teach students how to go to an academic advisor to
obtain and subsequently interpret a degree audit and to encourage their engagement in
student activities.

*Affective Development.* According to Beth, student success in reading preparatory
courses was the result of much more than changes in students’ comprehension and
vocabulary. Ostensibly, her counseling training influenced her to view students’ progress
holistically by looking for changes in their attitudes, perceptions, and behaviors.
Examples of such progress included learning to get to class on time and learning how to
solve transportation problems to get to class *regularly.*

In addition to QEP and general education assessments, the college developed a
number of feedback mechanisms to measure student affective development, engagement,
and satisfaction with College services. These included the Community College Survey of
Student Engagement, Noel-Levitz Student Satisfaction Inventory, and faculty focus
groups. The TRIO program (in Student Support Services), available through a federal
grant, used strategies for many years that made a difference in student success rates for
program participants at the college. In the TRIO program, a small population of non-
traditional students developed new attitudes and skills while progressing within a
“learning community.” The TRIO students achieved higher success rates than other students placed into developmental courses. This strategy was later adopted by members of the QEP toward the improvement of college preparatory success in a larger group of students.

*Success at the Next Level.* While faculty members often had to decide when they needed additional data to inform the learning outcomes assessment process, a consultant-written longitudinal tracking and reporting system used enrollment and completion data to produce *volumes* of data on student learning outcomes. The greatest challenge in analyzing these results was determining which data were relevant and which were not. Ultimately, faculty found that the key variables were student persistence, degrees awarded, ethnicity, and age. Further, the initial six-term follow-up process was eventually extended to eight. This two-year discovery process, in partnership with Institutional Research, was eventually worth the effort, as it narrowed the selection of the data measures for the QEP to those most relevant to college prep success. Fred described it this way:

[The longitudinal tracking system] was so intense in terms of what you could collect – after [Joe] and I sat and agreed on the amount of data we would collect, I then spent the next two years trying to figure out what I didn’t want. He could slice that cake in so many ways. So it was actually a system devolution, so to speak. We came down to the basic persister/non-persister. We came down to degrees awarded/non-degrees. We came down to success in entry level courses and we came down to simple demographics in terms of ethnicity and age. Later, I believe that led us to
select the right ones for the QEP, ‘cause [Joe] and I had been through that experience. But the first paper report was this thick! It was only six semesters, we later went to eight, so it was a process of discovering what we really needed, and that was simplification. (Interview with Fred)

Several measures of student success were discussed during the formation of the QEP, including course grades and test scores. However, the group concluded that success in the subsequent course was the best possible evidence of student success. Jeff, an assessment professional, commented that the adoption of this measure held great potential for aligning curriculum in prep and non-prep areas. The measures of student success designed into the QEP were primarily retention and success in courses and in next-level “gateway” courses, associated with various intervention strategies (such as learning communities). What the college more recently learned about planning for student learning outcomes assessment came mainly from on-site evaluators, who were generous in sharing their expertise. The on-site evaluators offered “analysis and comments” which have been incorporated into the plan to strengthen the QEP assessment.

Student success in the Associate in Arts (AA) program was also measured by success at the next level, usually in the form of upper division grade point average (GPA) at Florida universities. For example, when the GPA of AA transfers exceeded that of native university students, administrators saw evidence that curriculum was aligned and the content of the courses was appropriate. Michelle, the Dean of AA Programs, explained it this way:
To me success is when students come here and they transfer to a university and we track and see how they do the first term. We can see how they do when they transfer. Right now, I know for a fact our transfer student’s GPAs are just a little bit higher than the native students. So to me that’s so important to see that they’re successful at the next step, because I think that’s what we’re here for faculty -- to prepare them, in general. Now if we want to talk specifically about reading or English or communications, if they’re not successful regarding the skills they need in reading and English and becoming good writers and proficient readers, [it] cuts across all of the disciplines. To do well in Humanities, you have to be a good reader and a good writer and to do well in your science classes. When I see they’re successful at the next level, knowing the textbooks and the additional readings that students have to do in courses once they get to their junior or senior level, I see that students are succeeding and I can say “Hey, that student was in our prep program” -- that’s success. (Interview with Michelle)

Over the last three years, Academic Affairs has increasingly relied upon the Office of Institutional Research to provide progression data to track student success at the next level.

While Interview Question 2 investigated the goals for college prep students in addition to state mandated cut scores, Interview Question 9 sought to determine whether part-time faculty participated in outcomes assessment.
Interview Question 9 (Engagement of Temporary Faculty)

Do part-time/temporary faculty participate in outcomes assessment?

Participation in student learning outcomes assessment was limited to a handful of part-time faculty, typically those with an interest in curriculum governance and time to spend on campus during the day. As part-time faculty members usually came to the college only when they taught classes, participation in assessment activities was very difficult for them.

While an annual recognition program had been developed for highly participating adjunct instructors, some interview participants felt that more could have been done to involve them in curriculum development. Part-time faculty members participated in general education outcomes assessment by volunteering their classes for participation in the pilot, but had not to this point served as general education assessment committee members. Also, there were a few adjuncts in communications and mathematics who attended departmental meetings and had thus been involved in curriculum development discussions.

Participation in Developmental Education Improvement. Most faculty interviewed expressed the belief that part-time faculty would participate in developmental education assessment activities planned for the QEP. The large proportion of part-time faculty teaching college prep courses, especially in study skills and math, necessitated this involvement. For example, of all college preparatory course sections (reading, writing, and math) at Sunshine State in Fall 2003, 63% were taught by part-time faculty (Windham, 2005, Number and Percentage, p.1-5).

Fred assessed part-time faculty participation in the QEP this way:
They were asked to come, and they were invited to all the group meetings. We had one on our [QEP] subcommittee that I kept in communication with. If your retention rate between your full-time and part-time [faculty] is significantly different, then you need to have a faculty mentor on assessment. You need to bring your part-time people into it. [This is] another place where everybody needs work, ourselves included. We tried to include them. We did not include them as much as we should have. (Interview with Fred)

While considerable efforts were made to include part-time faculty in assessment activities, Fred felt that more could have been done to secure their participation in a systematic process to engage part-time faculty members in assessment.

*Participation in General Education Assessment.* Faculty members who had previously led general education outcomes assessment activities said that part-time faculty members were expected to again participate in the current year by volunteering their classes for general education outcomes assessment. Many part-time faculty members had participated the previous year by offering their classes during the pilot in Spring 2005.

*Recognition and Rewards.* According to one faculty member, part-time faculty members had an opportunity equal to that of full-time faculty to participate in college committees. The few who took advantage of that opportunity were likely candidates for the “Adjunct Faculty of the Year” award, announced at the end of the Spring term at the college-wide awards assembly. Near the end of the academic year, the VP for Academic Affairs sent out a request for nominations for this award. In determining the best
candidate, an awards committee reviewed nominations, looking at factors like high levels of committee participation and favorable student evaluations.

While part-time faculty members participated to the extent of their availability and interest, few became as connected to curriculum processes as full-time faculty members wished. Retired part-timers sometimes participated in committees and other on-campus events. However, those with other jobs, such as the dean of a local high school, simply did not have the time or sufficient incentives to participate. It was because of part-timers’ lack of participation in curriculum development processes on campus that some full-time faculty preferred that the college simply hire more full-timers.

While Interview Question 9 sought to determine whether part-time faculty members had participated in assessment activities, Question 10 investigated how developmental educators might better respond to the SACS requirement to use the results of student learning outcomes assessment for improvement.

*Interview Question 10 (Use of Results)*

How might developmental educators improve their response to this accreditation requirement?

“Use of results” of outcomes assessment activities has been one of the most frequently dispensed recommendations for improvement by SACS review committees since the approval of the revised standards in 2001 (Cleary, 2005). Although Sunshine State Community College had been proactive in creating a process to assess general education outcomes since 1998 and had created an exemplary Quality Enhancement Plan, all College programs had not been able to demonstrate the use of results for
improvement. Sunshine State Community College thus received two recommendations on the use of results (Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1 and 3.4.1) following their site visit for Re-affirmation of Accreditation (Key informant, Personal communication, April 26, 2006). These standards are cited below.

3.3.1 The institution identifies expected outcomes for its educational programs and its administrative and educational support services; assesses whether it achieves these outcomes; and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of those results.

3.4.1 The institution demonstrates that each educational program for which academic credit is awarded (a) is approved by the faculty and the administration, and (b) establishes and evaluates program and learning outcomes. (SACS, 2001, p. 22)

The question of how developmental educators could more effectively use the results of assessment was therefore made a part of this research to help others in answering the demands of their regional accrediting agencies. The analysis of Interview Question 10 is provided below.

Maida, a part-time faculty member, commented that to obtain more useful results from student learning outcomes assessment, developmental educators should begin with proven instructional strategies that work with specific populations of students:

Engaging in long-term research for courses, figure out what has worked in other areas, see what methods other schools are using, see how well it works for them. There’s a lot of research out there on certain
strategies that work for certain groups of people. And here we have a variety of students from all kinds of areas....There is a research effort to show that...international students learn best with these [strategies], mainstream learn best with these [strategies]. So if I’m going to be planning a lesson, a reading lesson for a class of 25 where seven are international, I know very well that I do not expect them to use maybe whole language method in arriving at meaning. I know that I have to break it down for them - teach main idea by the paragraph instead of telling them OK read this story and tell me what you think.... The international student needs to be assisted point to point, paragraph to paragraph, because he doesn’t have the level of proficiency, he doesn’t have the vocabulary, he doesn’t have enough of that stuff in his skill map to be able to transfer and do that, so those are the areas that I would like them to look at and there is research that supports that. (Interview with Maida)

Maida advocated that developmental educators use instructional strategies proven through educational research and then collect evidence of their local effectiveness.

Other advice came from Fred, a veteran faculty member: To ensure that faculty members who teach developmental courses use the results of outcomes assessment for improvement, faculty members must first value the results of the assessment, believing in the measures’ credibility. Second, while most faculty members will want to know what they can do to improve students’ chances for success, others will resist, citing issues of “academic freedom.” Third, faculty members’ time is very constrained by an already heavy workload. To justify asking faculty members to collect data in conjunction with
outcomes assessment, leaders must explain why it is necessary and how it is going to be used. Completion of this contract necessitates the use of the information collected for its advertised purpose.

**Information Sharing.** Carolyn, an assessment professional, commented that in order to better use assessment results to improve college preparatory instruction, those results needed to be shared often in a routine process. Following sharing, changes to curriculum in courses and programs needed to follow:

I think, bottom line, is we have to start sharing that often, regularly, routinely, it has to be discussed. It really has to be then utilized in classrooms and in program development, so I think that’s where we have a real weakness. We have those results out there and everybody talks about it once a year, but then nothing really happens. (Interview with Carolyn)

However, according to Carolyn, the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan changed that way of doing assessment in developmental education. As progress reports on the QEP were scheduled to go to SACS for review periodically, the developmental education assessment process took on a higher institutional profile and priority than it had before. Thus, there were plans to assess routinely, look at the results, share results widely, and then make program improvements based upon those results.

**Involve Adjunct Faculty Members in Assessment Activities.** According to still another faculty member, Beth, in order to use assessment results to improve instruction, developmental educators should:

1. examine assessment results,
2. determine how the information should be integrated into the curriculum, and
3. decide how to integrate it into individual classroom instructional strategies.

These steps often fail to occur, especially for adjuncts, because many are high school teachers who are only on campus long enough to teach their classes. While information sharing about college-wide best practices has not always been available to adjunct faculty, all faculty members can participate in the professional development activities most relevant to their practice. Faculty members are also encouraged to visit each others’ classrooms to pick up new techniques. Further, for the QEP initiative focused upon study skills, a retreat was planned, as well as an organized, continuous training and communication program for adjunct instructors.

**Discipline-Specific Application to Curriculum.** Developmental educators might be able to more effectively use the results of student learning outcomes assessment if they had more time to focus and reflect upon them, thus better understanding the implications for teaching their specific courses. However, one strategy with the potential to convert assessment results into curriculum changes would be to talk about the results more often in disciplinary subgroups. Geri, a study skills faculty member, expressed the opinion that while outcomes were frequently discussed in the large faculty colloquium group, most faculty members didn’t think about teaching in global terms:

> I think that if we really understood their connections with what we were doing in our classes, and maybe use those as workshop and training tools. You know, here are the areas that we’ve got to address. Within our interaction with students, how can we do that? What best suits me in my study skills class, what best suits me in my wellness class, what best suits
me in my teaching of history class. I really think we need to do that. A lot of what we do with outcomes, we talk about it within the big huge colloquium group. I understand there are global things that we all could address, but I think most of the time faculty members don’t think like that. I think most of the time they really are kind of like “What does that have to do with my history course?” I really think because they’re kind of wrapped up in their subject. I think it would be better if you said, OK, so here is one of our outcomes and here’s how we did it and how we’d like to do it and how we’re evaluating it. So how does this fit into your course, what elements do you have, how can we enhance those elements, and how can we share them between faculty members? I think that would be more useful than talking about them in the big group. (Interview with Geri)

What would provide more improvement through curriculum development, Geri said, would be for someone to define the connections between assessment results and disciplinary teaching, to develop training tools, and then to hold a required workshop for faculty in the discipline on how to incorporate these new teaching strategies within their courses.

*Developing New Habits though Professional Development.* Difficulty getting into new habits may be preventing developmental educators from making full use of assessment results for learning improvement. While measurement and assessment are important to the college’s culture and funding, Terri expressed the opinion that college preparatory faculty found it difficult to adopt measurement habits.
Developmental educators tend to be a very emotional bunch. They tend to be the kind of people who are in human services and want to help people. So specific measurements are not something they’re accustomed to being defined by. I think they have gut feelings. They may be able to tell you that this many people passed the state mandated test at the end of the course, but they can’t always tell you how they got from A to B.

(Interview with Terri)

Through practice, many faculty members with a long service in teaching have trusted their “gut feelings” about what makes students successful and are reluctant to adopt evidence-based processes. Professional development and encouragement may slowly improve the adoption of measurement-based teaching and learning.

While this section of the chapter has investigated topical issues of the case in order to explore their interplay with research findings, the next section provides a summary of each of the eight research questions and three topical issues explored in this study.

VI. Chapter Four Summary

This section provides a summary of major findings of research questions, instrumental issues in the case, and topical questions, secondary issues that often interplay with research issues.
Summary of Research Questions

Eight research questions were investigated in this case study of Sunshine State Community College. Presented below is a point by point summary of the research findings as they correspond to each research question.

Research Question 1. How is the professional preparation and educational background of a developmental education faculty member like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?

Findings. Dimensions of professional preparation and experience included professional development, experience, and subject and level of educational degree. Although assessment professionals, who assume primarily facilitative roles in student learning outcomes assessment, tended to hold doctorates more often than faculty teaching developmental courses, their educational preparation and professional development interests shared many similarities. For example, the research director, whose experience included years of teaching business and computer applications courses, talked enthusiastically about his use of material from a workshop on authentic assessment within his computer applications class. Two of the assessment professionals interviewed had doctorates in education.

Faculty members, likewise, brought a variety of experiences to teaching, including coaching and counseling. Faculty members were actively engaged in developing their measurement and teaching and learning expertise, as evidenced by their past, present, and future references to professional development in interviews. For example, Beth, a faculty member, believed that statistics courses she had previously taken had been helpful in planning and conducting learning outcomes assessment. She
was looking forward to an opportunity to further sharpen her measurement skills. Patterns of professional development in faculty and assessment professionals showed that both groups valued measurement and teaching and learning expertise greatly.

*Research Question 2.* How is the assessment role of a developmental education faculty member like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?

*Findings.* Aspects of the assessment role were communication, participation, and instrumentation. While a small number of faculty members assumed a facilitative role similar to that of assessment professional, staff members designated for that role by title (e.g., Assessment Coordinator) and reporting structure were limited in their expected analytical response to the results of outcomes. That is, while assessment professionals interpreted the results and recommended areas for changes to instructional strategies, only faculty and instructional administrators implemented and monitored those changes. For example, Fred, a veteran faculty member, asked for longitudinal outcomes data from assessment professionals to determine how prep students did after they completed prep classes. The resulting classroom and follow-up measurement strategies were both developed and implemented by Fred and other communications faculty members.

Patterns of communication differed between faculty and assessment professionals. While faculty members referred to occasions when they *received* assessment communication, assessment professionals assumed a much more proactive role, both *receiving* and *initiating* assessment communication. Further, the participation of an assessment professional was qualitatively different than that of a faculty member. Faculty members focused the discussion upon the outcome they would like to achieve for the student. Assessment professionals, on the other hand, reframed the outcome in a way
that was credible to faculty and measurable in terms of student response. This process, however, was not always without a struggle. Terri and Geri, for example, talked about how faculty found it difficult to measure the outcomes they wanted for students. Agreeing upon an acceptable assessment usually meant talking through their differences with assessment professionals in point of view and vocabulary. Assessment professionals thus combined their expertise in research design with faculty curriculum expertise to customize a measure (or measures) for a particular outcome, although the measure was sometimes less than optimum from a faculty perspective.

Research Question 3. Which collaborative strategies serve to create common ground for faculty members and assessment professionals to work together on assessment plans?

Findings. Transformation in the structure of the College’s Quality Enhancement Plan through three phases (research, strategy formulation, and implementation) ensured the flow of information into and out of the main policy and strategy-making body for developmental education. For example, in Phase I (Research), the structure was characterized by a loose confederation of research groups with diverse memberships. Represented on the steering committee were academic faculty and staff members from learning resources, arts and sciences, vocational programs, academic support. Also represented were student services folks from enrollment, student support, testing, and counseling.

The multiple structures, both vertical (steering) and horizontal (coordinating), made widespread inclusion and participation possible. The QEP Committee was designed
with a porous boundary. This enabled official members of the Committee to bring other faculty and staff (such as assessment professionals) into dialog when appropriate. This diversity in membership and task meant inclusion of a more complete set of knowledge about how to deliver programs and services to students in developmental education.

The college also used structure to form a gateway by creating common ground for collaboration, thus becoming a "community of practice" (Wenger et al, 2002, p.1). This occurred by structuring deliberate activities over a number of years (i.e., an annual learning theme) that made possible both thoughtful reflection about the college’s vision statement and the celebration of that vision. With faculty and staff members thus joining in college-wide learning activities, the habit of collaborating in smaller groups for learning assessment through structured interactions has the potential to become a more routine practice.

Continuous transformation of the organizational structure to accommodate tasks to be accomplished, activities involving individual and group reflection such as the faculty colloquium, and occasions for the celebration of college successes such as the annual awards ceremony created the common ground for faculty and assessment professionals to work together on assessment plans toward the improvement of developmental education.

*Research Question 4.* Which strategies cause estrangement between faculty members and assessment professionals?

*Findings.* Themes that explained estrangement between faculty members and assessment professionals included academic structure, barriers to collaboration, and collaboration partners. While organizational structure served as a barrier to participation
and communication in some cases, it became a gateway in others. The formal structure of the academic leadership team, for example, served as a gateway for effective communication within academic affairs, but served as a barrier to direct communication with assessment professionals for most faculty members. Geri, for example, indicated that while she had received reports on student achievement from institutional research, she couldn’t recall actually discussing the information with an assessment professional.

The academic structure had bridges to institutional research through the QEP and general education outcomes assessment processes. However, the academic-research communications barrier, according to Joe (the institutional research director), kept the research office from entering conversations with faculty about identifying learning outcomes in specific course outlines that would have assisted the development of an effective and complete outcomes assessment strategy for general education.

Research Question 5. What role, if any, does an assessment professional play in determining how the results of student learning outcomes assessment will be used for improvement?

Findings. A concept that developed in the analysis of this study was “analytical response.” The concept was defined as the role one plays in interpreting, evaluating, and using the results of outcomes assessment. A low analytical response would be to acknowledge the results of outcomes assessment. Faculty members discussing the results of outcomes assessment at a college-wide colloquium would provide an example of low analytical response. A moderate level of analytical response would be to recommend changes to curriculum and instruction based upon the results. An example of this would be an instructional administrator making plans within the college’s Learning
Management Team to change instructional strategies. However, a high level of analytical response would be to implement and monitor such changes. An example of this would be the decision of the QEP Committee to implement a learning community model as one strategy to improve student success.

Assessment professionals played a limited role in determining how the results of student learning outcomes assessment would be used for instructional improvement, remaining at a low to moderate analytical response to assessment results (acknowledging and recommending changes). They instead helped faculty by interpreting results and by assisting faculty developing tools for outcomes assessment to reframe their research questions (outcomes) in a more measurable way.

**Research Question 6.** Have faculty members at the college become more like assessment professionals and assessment professionals more like faculty members in terms of their assessment roles since they began collaborating on student learning outcomes assessment?

**Findings.** Evidence of the capacity for self-reflection could be found in the copious responses to the thought-provoking questions posed to both faculty and assessment professionals in individual and focus group interviews. Participants really reached down to find answers to the questions posed by this researcher in these interviews. Often a more complete answer to a previous question would emerge in later conversation, after the participant had time to think about it. Mary, in particular, was an enthusiastic proponent of reflexivity, both in her practice of teaching and as a component of curriculum.
Faculty talked about the desire to pursue professional development toward increased expertise on measurement topics or emphasized how valuable their courses in measurement were in developing assessment instruments. Similarly, assessment professionals like Carolyn talked enthusiastically about their newly acquired knowledge about teaching and learning for developmental education resulting from the research phase in the development of the QEP.

While all interview participants exhibited characteristics of reflexivity and a desire to learn about both teaching and learning and measurement, there was little evidence that the roles of faculty members and assessment professionals were merging because of their separate lines of authority. The decision-making and implementation role of academic affairs in outcomes assessment was to refine criteria for determining a students’ level of proficiency in a faculty-defined competency. Assessment professionals provided a valuable (but limited) complement to that role by helping faculty to frame research questions (outcomes) in a measurable way. Without good instruments for authentic assessment, the outcomes assessment process would be limited to measuring proxies for learning like grades. Assessment professionals facilitated and coordinated the logistics of the assessment process and provided an interpretation of the results (Learning Outcomes Assessment Task Force Report).

**Research Question 7.** If so, how have they become more alike?

**Findings.** In acquiring teaching and learning and measurement expertise, faculty and assessment professionals have been on similar professional development paths. Faculty members and assessment professionals mentioned similar types of professional development and training, both on- and off-campus. For example, faculty cited John
Roeuche, Patricia Cross, Hunter Boylan, Trudy Banta, Peter Elbow (writing as a process of discovery), Jack Misero (transformative learning), Vincent Tinto, and Skip Downing as assessment experts whose advice they had sought. Likewise, assessment professionals cited Bob McCabe (2003) and Bill Blank, a USF faculty member who had taught an on-campus professional development activity on contextual learning for college faculty and staff members. Joe, an assessment professional, talked about the lessons from that session he put to use in a class he taught part-time. Thus, faculty and assessment professionals alike supplemented their core knowledge in student learning outcomes assessment with both measurement and teaching and learning expertise.

However, while knowledge of teaching and learning was essential to applying measurement expertise to learning problems, one of the limitations upon the analytical response of the Assessment Coordinator came from the dual roles demanded by Jeff’s job description. His role as legislative liaison and other duties sometimes necessitated Jeff’s presence elsewhere, as indicated in conversation with Geri, a faculty member who recalled that Jeff had been temporarily reassigned and unable to participate in QEP implementation meetings. Both his role as legislative liaison and as an interim campus director placed Jeff squarely in the role of administrator, sometimes in conflict with his role as a measurement consultant and coordinator of QEP assessments. Thus, while assessment professionals shared the same professional development interests as faculty, the differences in their assigned roles within the organizational structure caused them to place emphasis on different tasks, at times.

Research Question 8. From the perspective of respondents, which assessment approaches have shown the most promising results?
*Findings.* The college’s crowning achievement was developing a Quality Enhancement Plan for the improvement of developmental education based upon best practices in the field. The details of these processes show the way toward improving collaboration on assessment planning, not only for the improvement of developmental education, but for all outcomes assessment efforts at Sunshine State Community College. Faculty members and assessment professionals alike agreed that the QEP was an exemplary plan for college preparatory success. The process began with a complete literature review and incorporated many strategies that had been successful at other institutions.

One example of a successful collaboration was the development of the college’s learning communities model. Dina, a faculty member, led a small group of about five individuals in planning the model for the QEP. Because they needed more information, they brought in a consultant, a successful practitioner of the learning communities model from a college in North Carolina. They explored the various models used at other institutions that allowed students to take pairs of related courses within a cohort, and emerged from that meeting with their own learning community model. Dina also consulted with institutional research to select the population for the initial learning community cohort group. In this case, a practitioner was able to lend instructional expertise and institutional research was able to lend its data analysis know-how to make the effort work.

One of the college's success strategies was to focus upon the quality of the faculty who teach developmental courses. According to Mary, who straddled both prep and non-prep courses, faculty who taught a mix of developmental and non-developmental courses
had a better idea of what it took for that student to succeed in credit level courses. This
group’s cohesiveness meant that when Fred asked them to make changes to instruction
suggested by results of longitudinal tracking, faculty members were willing to put in the
extra time and effort.

While this portion of the Chapter Four Summary focused upon the findings of the
eight main research questions in this study, the next portion of the Chapter Four
Summary will summarize findings from three interview questions that bear upon topical
issues of the case.

**Summary of Topical Issues**

Topical issues were secondary issues that provided background information to
help in understanding the interplay of instrumental issues (research questions). The three
interview questions cited below provided evidence in support of these issues.

*Interview Question 2 (Goal).* Are there goals for developmental education other
than cognitive skills dictated by Florida state-mandated testing?

*Findings.* Developmental education goals, in addition to cut scores on state-
mandated exams, included one of the college’s general education outcomes “self-
direction.” Other goals included student affective development (e.g., motivation), and
success at the next level (e.g., course, program). Self-direction was a general education
competency contributed by students and valued by faculty. However, the college has
made limited progress in developing a reliable direct measure for this outcome.

*Interview Question 9 (Engagement of Temporary Faculty):* Do part-
time/temporary faculty participate in outcomes assessment?
Findings. While part-timers were invited to participate in the QEP, their involvement was limited because so many had full-time day jobs. This prevented many of part-timers from communicating directly with full-time faculty and fully participating in the College’s social life and governance processes. It was for this reason that some full-time faculty preferred that the College hire more full-time instructors. However, the part-time faculty members interviewed for this study indicated an eagerness to participate in curriculum development activities if invited to do so.

Interview Question 10 (Use of Results): How might developmental educators improve their response to this accreditation requirement?

Findings. Both part-time and full-time faculty indicated that classroom research should be based upon proven instructional strategies for specific populations of students (e.g., international), that the College should develop discipline specific workshops on the application of assessment results to classroom instruction, and develop measurement habits within each discipline’s respective community of practice.

While this chapter presented the findings of this case study, both research and topical, Chapter Five discusses those findings in the context of the Literature Review in Chapter Two and presents the conclusions and implications that may be drawn from those findings.
Chapter Five

Major Findings, Conclusions, and Implications for Theory, Practice, and Research

This chapter discusses conclusions that may be drawn from findings described in Chapter Four, limitations of those findings, and their implications in terms of theory, practice, and research.

To recap information presented in previous chapters, Chapter One, Introduction, highlighted some of the reasons why helping students successfully complete a college education has recently become an urgent mission. Stumbling blocks many students must overcome in this journey are college preparatory reading and writing. Colleges are therefore using student learning outcomes assessment and learning evidence teams to improve students’ chances for success. As the use of assessment becomes more prevalent, institutional research and teaching functions are moving closer to one another and learning more about the scholarship of teaching. The “measurement” intersection between their professions is where the data interpretation process takes place. Beyond interpretation, however, this sense making process is a lynchpin in the use of data to ensure the appropriate application of college resources to solve persistent problems in student learning.

Chapter Two, Literature Review, described the corner of the stage upon which the actors in this case, faculty and assessment professionals, conduct student learning
outcomes assessment while taking their cues from governing boards and accreditation agencies. The chapter discussed governmental and accreditation pressures on colleges to adopt outcomes assessment processes, faculty and institutional research roles, the scholarship of assessment, organizational change theory, examples of action research with a potential to improve student learning, measurement opportunities for colleges, best practices in developmental education, the Florida policy environment in which Sunshine State Community College operates, and challenges currently faced by the College in improving student learning in developmental courses.

Chapter Three, Methods, described the manner in which this researcher used qualitative methods within a case study model to examine the institutional context, processes, and change strategies employed by faculty and assessment professionals in assessing student learning outcomes in developmental reading, writing, and study skills. Multiple sources of data collected through an ethical process were used to examine the context in which these professionals worked to improve student success.

Major Findings

This section provides a summary of major findings of research questions, instrumental issues in the case, and topical questions, secondary issues that often interplay with research issues.
Summary of Research Questions

Eight research questions were investigated in this case study of Sunshine State Community College. Presented below is a point by point summary of the research findings as they correspond to each research question.

Research Question 1. How is the professional preparation and educational background of a developmental education faculty member like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?

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Faculty members, likewise, brought a variety of experiences to teaching, including coaching and counseling. Faculty members were actively engaged in developing their measurement and teaching and learning expertise, as evidenced by their past, present, and future references to professional development in interviews. For example, Beth, a faculty member, believed that statistics courses she had previously taken had been helpful in planning and conducting learning outcomes assessment. She
was looking forward to an opportunity to further sharpen her measurement skills. Patterns of professional development in faculty and assessment professionals showed that both groups valued measurement and teaching and learning expertise greatly.

Research Question 2. How is the assessment role of a developmental education faculty member like that of an assessment professional, and how is it different?

Findings. Aspects of the assessment role were communication, participation, and instrumentation. While a small number of faculty members assumed a facilitative role similar to that of assessment professional, staff members designated for that role by title (e.g., Assessment Coordinator) and reporting structure were limited in their expected analytical response to the results of outcomes. That is, while assessment professionals interpreted the results and recommended areas for changes to instructional strategies, only faculty and instructional administrators implemented and monitored those changes. For example, Fred, a veteran faculty member, asked for longitudinal outcomes data from assessment professionals to determine how prep students did after they completed prep classes. The resulting classroom and follow-up measurement strategies were both developed and implemented by Fred and other communications faculty members.

Patterns of communication differed between faculty and assessment professionals. While faculty members referred to occasions when they received assessment communication, assessment professionals assumed a much more proactive role, both receiving and initiating assessment communication. Further, the participation of an assessment professional was qualitatively different than that of a faculty member. Faculty members focused the discussion upon the outcome they would like to achieve for the student. Assessment professionals, on the other hand, reframed the outcome in a way
that was credible to faculty and measurable in terms of student response. This process, however, was not always without a struggle. Terri and Geri, for example, talked about how faculty found it difficult to measure the outcomes they wanted for students. Agreeing upon an acceptable assessment usually meant talking through their differences with assessment professionals in point of view and vocabulary. Assessment professionals thus combined their expertise in research design with faculty curriculum expertise to customize a measure (or measures) for a particular outcome, although the measure was sometimes less than optimum from a faculty perspective.

*Research Question 3.* Which collaborative strategies serve to create common ground for faculty members and assessment professionals to work together on assessment plans?

*Findings.* Transformation in the structure of the College’s Quality Enhancement Plan through three phases (research, strategy formulation, and implementation) ensured the flow of information into and out of the main policy and strategy-making body for developmental education. For example, in Phase I (Research), the structure was characterized by a loose confederation of research groups with diverse memberships. Represented on the steering committee were academic faculty and staff members from learning resources, arts and sciences, vocational programs, academic support. Also represented were student services folks from enrollment, student support, testing, and counseling.

The multiple structures, both vertical (steering) and horizontal (coordinating), made widespread inclusion and participation possible. The QEP Committee was designed
with a porous boundary. This enabled official members of the Committee to bring other faculty and staff (such as assessment professionals) into dialog when appropriate. This diversity in membership and task meant inclusion of a more complete set of knowledge about how to deliver programs and services to students in developmental education.

The College also used structure to form a gateway by creating common ground for collaboration, thus becoming a "community of practice" (Wenger et al, 2002, p.1). This occurred by structuring deliberate activities over a number of years (i.e., an annual learning theme) that made possible both thoughtful reflection about the college’s vision statement and the celebration of that vision. With faculty and staff members thus joining in college-wide learning activities, the habit of collaborating in smaller groups for learning assessment through structured interactions has the potential to become a more routine practice.

Continuous transformation of the organizational structure to accommodate tasks to be accomplished, activities involving individual and group reflection such as the faculty colloquium, and occasions for the celebration of college successes such as the annual awards ceremony created the common ground for faculty and assessment professionals to work together on assessment plans toward the improvement of developmental education.

Research Question 4. Which strategies cause estrangement between faculty members and assessment professionals?

Findings. Themes that explained estrangement between faculty members and assessment professionals included academic structure, barriers to collaboration, and collaboration partners. While organizational structure served as a barrier to participation
and communication in some cases, it became a gateway in others. The formal structure of the academic leadership team, for example, served as a gateway for effective communication within academic affairs, but served as a barrier to direct communication with assessment professionals for most faculty members. Geri, for example, indicated that while she had received reports on student achievement from institutional research, she couldn’t recall actually discussing the information with an assessment professional.

The academic structure had bridges to institutional research through the QEP and general education outcomes assessment processes. However, the academic-research communications barrier, according to Joe (the institutional research director), kept the research office from entering conversations with faculty about identifying learning outcomes in specific course outlines that would have assisted the development of an effective and complete outcomes assessment strategy for general education.

Research Question 5. What role, if any, does an assessment professional play in determining how the results of student learning outcomes assessment will be used for improvement?

Findings. A concept that developed in the analysis of this study was “analytical response.” The concept was defined as the role one plays in interpreting, evaluating, and using the results of outcomes assessment. A low analytical response would be to acknowledge the results of outcomes assessment. Faculty members discussing the results of outcomes assessment at a college-wide colloquium would provide an example of low analytical response. A moderate level of analytical response would be to recommend changes to curriculum and instruction based upon the results. An example of this would be an instructional administrator making plans within the college’s Learning
Management Team to change instructional strategies. However, a high level of analytical response would be to implement and monitor such changes. An example of this would be the decision of the QEP Committee to implement a learning community model as one strategy to improve student success.

Assessment professionals played a limited role in determining how the results of student learning outcomes assessment would be used for instructional improvement, remaining at a low to moderate analytical response to assessment results (acknowledging and recommending changes). They instead helped faculty by interpreting results and by assisting faculty developing tools for outcomes assessment to reframe their research questions (outcomes) in a more measurable way.

*Research Question 6.* Have faculty members at the college become more like assessment professionals and assessment professionals more like faculty members in terms of their assessment roles since they began collaborating on student learning outcomes assessment?

*Findings.* Evidence of the capacity for self-reflection could be found in the copious responses to the thought-provoking questions posed to both faculty and assessment professionals in individual and focus group interviews. Participants really reached down to find answers to the questions posed by this researcher in these interviews. Often a more complete answer to a previous question would emerge in later conversation, after the participant had time to think about it. Mary, in particular, was an enthusiastic proponent of reflexivity, both in her practice of teaching and as a component of curriculum.
Faculty talked about the desire to pursue professional development toward increased expertise on measurement topics or emphasized how valuable their courses in measurement were in developing assessment instruments. Similarly, assessment professionals like Carolyn talked enthusiastically about their newly acquired knowledge about teaching and learning for developmental education resulting from the research phase in the development of the QEP.

While all interview participants exhibited characteristics of reflexivity and a desire to learn about both teaching and learning and measurement, there was little evidence that the roles of faculty members and assessment professionals were merging because of their separate lines of authority. The decision-making and implementation role of academic affairs in outcomes assessment was to refine criteria for determining a students’ level of proficiency in a faculty-defined competency. Assessment professionals provided a valuable (but limited) complement to that role by helping faculty to frame research questions (outcomes) in a measurable way. Without good instruments for authentic assessment, the outcomes assessment process would be limited to measuring proxies for learning like grades. Assessment professionals facilitated and coordinated the logistics of the assessment process and provided an interpretation of the results (Learning Outcomes Assessment Task Force Report).

Research Question 7. If so, how have they become more alike?

Findings. In acquiring teaching and learning and measurement expertise, faculty and assessment professionals have been on similar professional development paths. Faculty members and assessment professionals mentioned similar types of professional development and training, both on- and off-campus. For example, faculty cited John
Roeuche, Patricia Cross, Hunter Boylan, Trudy Banta, Peter Elbow (writing as a process of discovery), Jack Misero (transformative learning), Vincent Tinto, and Skip Downing as assessment experts whose advice they had sought. Likewise, assessment professionals cited Bob McCabe (2003) and Bill Blank, a USF faculty member who had taught an on-campus professional development activity on contextual learning for college faculty and staff members. Joe, an assessment professional, talked about the lessons from that session he put to use in a class he taught part-time. Thus, faculty and assessment professionals alike supplemented their core knowledge in student learning outcomes assessment with both measurement and teaching and learning expertise.

However, while knowledge of teaching and learning was essential to applying measurement expertise to learning problems, one of the limitations upon the analytical response of the Assessment Coordinator came from the dual roles in demanded by Jeff’s job description. His role as legislative liaison and other duties sometimes necessitated Jeff’s presence elsewhere, as indicated in conversation with Geri, a faculty member who recalled that Jeff had been temporarily reassigned and unable to participate in QEP implementation meetings. Both his role as legislative liaison and as an interim campus director placed Jeff squarely in the role of administrator, sometimes in conflict with his role as a measurement consultant and coordinator of QEP assessments. Thus, while assessment professionals shared the same professional development interests as faculty, the differences in their assigned roles within the organizational structure caused them to place emphasis on different tasks, at times.

Research Question 8. From the perspective of respondents, which assessment approaches have shown the most promising results?
Findings. The college’s crowning achievement was developing a Quality Enhancement Plan for the improvement of developmental education based upon best practices in the field. The details of these processes show the way toward improving collaboration on assessment planning, not only for the improvement of developmental education, but for all outcomes assessment efforts at Sunshine State Community College. Faculty members and assessment professionals alike agreed that the QEP was an exemplary plan for college preparatory success. The process began with a complete literature review and incorporated many strategies that had been successful at other institutions.

One example of a successful collaboration was the development of the college’s learning communities model. Dina, a faculty member, led a small group of about five individuals in planning the model for the QEP. Because they needed more information, they brought in a consultant, a successful practitioner of the learning communities model from a college in North Carolina. They explored the various models used at other institutions that allowed students to take pairs of related courses within a cohort, and emerged from that meeting with their own learning community model. Dina also consulted with institutional research to select the population for the initial learning community cohort group. In this case, a practitioner was able to lend instructional expertise and institutional research was able to lend its data analysis know-how to make the effort work.

One of the college's success strategies was to focus upon the quality of the faculty who teach developmental courses. According to Mary, who straddled both prep and non-prep courses, faculty who taught a mix of developmental and non-developmental courses
had a better idea of what it took for that student to succeed in credit level courses. This
group’s cohesiveness meant that when Fred asked them to make changes to instruction
suggested by results of longitudinal tracking, faculty members were willing to put in the
extra time and effort.

While this portion of the Chapter Four Summary focused upon the findings of the
eight main research questions in this study, the next portion of the Chapter Four
Summary will summarize findings from three interview questions that bear upon topical
issues of the case.

Summary of Topical Issues

Topical issues were secondary issues that provided background information to
help in understanding the interplay of instrumental issues (research questions). The three
interview questions cited below provided evidence in support of these issues.

Interview Question 2 (Goal). Are there goals for developmental education other
than cognitive skills dictated by Florida state-mandated testing?

Findings. Developmental education goals, in addition to cut scores on state-
mandated exams, included one of the college’s general education outcomes “self-
direction.” Other goals included student affective development (e.g., motivation), and
success at the next level (e.g., course, program). Self-direction was a general education
competency contributed by students and valued by faculty. However, the college has
made limited progress in developing a reliable direct measure for this outcome.

Interview Question 9 (Engagement of Temporary Faculty): Do part-
time/temporary faculty participate in outcomes assessment?
Findings. While part-timers were invited to participate in the QEP, their involvement was limited because so many had full-time day jobs. This prevented many of part-timers from communicating directly with full-time faculty and fully participating in the college’s social life and governance processes. It was for this reason that some full-time faculty preferred that the College hire more full-time instructors. However, the part-time faculty members interviewed for this study indicated an eagerness to participate in curriculum development activities if invited to do so.

Interview Question 10 (Use of Results): How might developmental educators improve their response to this accreditation requirement?

Findings. Both part-time and full-time faculty indicated that classroom research should be based upon proven instructional strategies for specific populations of students (e.g., international), that the College should develop discipline specific workshops on the application of assessment results to classroom instruction, and develop measurement habits within each discipline’s respective community of practice.

While this chapter presented the findings of this case study, both research and topical, Chapter Five discusses those findings in the context of the Literature Review in Chapter Two and presents the conclusions and implications that may be drawn from those findings.

Conclusions

Conclusion for Research Questions. Establishing effective assessment practices within institutions is a complex task. The effectiveness of assessment has many dependencies, and factors outside of the classroom often impact student learning. To
improve student learning, colleges are re-thinking how their various functions work together to improve student learning outcomes. Thus, while colleges may seek to use measurement professionals more effectively to aid faculty in improving student learning outcomes, aspects of a college’s planning, professional development, and information dissemination, and organizational structure may hinder or help that process. While faculty and assessment professionals seem to have similar professional preparation, experience, and interests, the roles they are expected to play (position descriptions) and the structures within which they must operate (organization chart) should be mutually compatible so that the partnership can be as effective as possible. Continuous transformation of the organizational structure during the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan, college-wide activities that enabled individual and collective reflection upon the College’s vision, and occasions for celebration brought faculty and assessment professionals together. Filtering mechanisms such as academic leadership teams tended to keep them apart. For example, Beth, a faculty member, commented that communications with faculty on assessment activities could be improved:

Where the information sharing needs to be improved and must occur is with the general faculty for both initiatives (e.g., general education, QEP). If we’re going to get college-wide faculty to buy in and actually participate and support these initiatives, they need to know about it. Currently, there’s not very much communication with faculty at large.

(Interview with Beth)

The determining factor in what the role of an assessment professional should be is the analytical response expected by College administrators. At Sunshine State
Community College, assessment professionals assumed a moderate role in responding analytically to the results of outcomes assessment. In their moderate role, they acknowledged or recommended changes to curriculum or assessment processes based upon their interpretation of results, but left decisions about implementation and monitoring to faculty members. Their main function in assessment was to help faculty members frame research questions (student learning outcomes) in a measurable way. Jeff commented on his role in supporting assessment:

I was brought in as a facilitator so I picked up last year’s activities up through the pilot, right after they completed their matrix and made a decision to do an assessment process that was localized in nature. And also what they call a cross-sectional view. So they’d already made all their decisions on how they were going to do assessment, so they were looking for someone to carry out that process. What we’re finding now is that these localized instruments do not necessarily apply best to all circumstances. Because we have identified assessment week where we apply these instrument one week of the year, we find that the speech component of communications doesn’t necessarily line up with one week of the year, so we’re looking at doing those in more and more of an embedded fashion. Interpersonal skills is another one. And computer literacy is one that did not work. The local instrument did not work for us this past pilot, so we’re actually going to look at some nationally normed instruments to assess that learning outcome. And so, even though I wasn’t on the front end of things you find that the administration and faculty are
flexible. You’ll get where you want to go with assessment in the long-run, and it just takes a little longer that way.

Thus, Jeff performed the role of measurement facilitator, combining research expertise with faculty defined outcomes to negotiate suitable measures for the process.

*Conclusion for Topical Issues.* Interview questions 2, 9, and 10 probed relevant topical issues including goals for developmental education, part-time faculty involvement in assessment activities, and the use of assessment results.

Findings from this study showed that faculty members focused upon more than just State-mandated exit exams as goals for developmental courses. Faculty interviewed named the general education outcome “self-direction,” affective development (i.e., motivation), and success at the next level (i.e., course) as outcomes they wished to achieve for students. These outcomes were measured by the Community College Survey of Student Engagement, Florida Accountability Reports, and the College’s general education assessment process. The College’s Director of Institutional Research had responsibility for carrying out these assessments and disseminating results to College administrators. However, there was little evidence that this information was filtering down through the hierarchy to faculty members. Mary, for example, said that faculty rarely talked with one another about assessment.

While full-time faculty and instructional administrators have created venues for the involvement of part-time faculty such as retreats and colloquiaums, the part-time faculty interviewed in this case study indicated that they were not involved in any collaboration on student learning outcomes assessment outside of their classrooms. To achieve genuine “traction” from the College’s learning outcomes processes, both the
young (often part-time) and the veteran (often full-time) faculty members participating in student learning outcomes assessment must find a common meeting ground. If that common ground also includes the often-noted scarce resource “time” and the participation of assessment professionals, the College will have gathered the ingredients it needs to begin making genuine progress in improving student learning outcomes.

Sunshine State Community College faculty and staff may be stinging from the SACS recommendations on “use of results” despite their long history in the development of a general education assessment process. Although faculty began the process of defining general education outcomes in 1998, it was not until Spring 2005 that the Learning Outcomes Committee conducted its first pilot assessment of general education outcomes. In their recent compliance audit and site visit for the reaffirmation of accreditation, College academic and student services programs had not been able to demonstrate the use of results for improvement. Sunshine State Community College thus received two recommendations for improvement on the use of results (Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1 and 3.4.1) following their site visit (Key informant, Personal communication, April 26, 2006).

However, one suggestion with great potential for improving that record was made by Geri, a faculty member who felt that the dissemination of research on outcomes to faculty should be accompanied by discipline and course-specific information on the outcome’s application to curriculum. A study skills faculty member, Geri expressed the opinion that although outcomes were frequently discussed in the large faculty colloquium group, most faculty members didn’t think about assessments and they way they should impact teaching in global terms:
I think that if we really understood their connections with what we were doing in our classes, and maybe use those as workshop and training tools. A lot of what we do with outcomes, we talk about it within the big huge colloquium group. I understand there are global things that we all could address, but I think most of the time faculty don’t think like that.

(Interview with Geri)

What would provide more improvement through curriculum development, Geri said, would be for someone to define the connections between assessment results and disciplinary teaching, to develop training tools, and then to hold a required workshop for faculty in the discipline on how to incorporate these new teaching strategies within their courses. The involvement of assessment professionals in this process would be an invaluable link to the infusion of reliable and valid measurement strategies into classroom research.

Conclusion for Timeline. A chronological analysis contributed to conclusions of the study. The College’s long history (since 1998) of developing general education outcomes and striving to improve the college preparatory program through longitudinal tracking of student success incubated a powerful faculty learning community and an alliance with assessment professionals. This collective community of practice, when provided the right structure and leadership, enabled the College to create a Quality Enhancement Plan that faculty and staff members could be proud of.
Limitations

Although the co-curricular contributions of other community college faculty and staff members (as in learning resources) and academic administrators can greatly contribute to student learning, findings of this study have focused narrowly on the interactions between faculty members teaching developmental education courses and assessment professionals such as institutional researchers. A study of the phenomenon of collaboration among developmental educators and assessment professionals at Sunshine State Community College, this research offers focused insights into a small but important segment of a much larger set of strategies needed to conduct effective assessment within a community college. For example, resources such as time, leadership, and money are also important organizational foundations for successful assessment practice.

Another limitation of these findings is that the boundaries of this case and the authenticity of experience to each individual reader may or may not permit “naturalistic generalizations” (Stake, 1995, p. 86) concerning the applicability of aspects of the case to the reader’s own college. Each reader must eventually decide on his or her own what portions of a case apply to another and which do not. For example, while this researcher was able to elicit broad involvement from relevant full-time faculty in this research, only two of the eight faculty members interviewed were classified as part-time/ temporary. The full-time faculty members interviewed were valuable informants of the developmental education assessment process, but represented the opinions of less than half of faculty teaching developmental classes at the College in 2003 (Windham, 2005, Number and percentage).
A unique aspect of this case study, although not necessarily a limitation, is the disproportionately large number of academics (9) interviewed compared to the small number of assessment professionals (3) interviewed. This is due to the very small number of institutional research (IR) personnel typically found in colleges, particularly in community colleges. For example, Morest (2005) found IR functions at these colleges to be thinly supported. Only 27% of colleges had IR departments of 1.5 full-time equivalent employees or more, 40% had a single IR position at the college, and 19% of colleges split IR with other duties (p.5). Eighty-five out of a sample of 200 colleges responded to this electronic survey, and researchers personally interviewed staff from 30 colleges in 15 states (p. 2) to obtain this data. Thus, although the sampling of academics and assessment professionals within this case study is unequal, it is proportionate to their occurrence within a typical community college.

Implications for Theory

Theoretical implications of these findings include a major role for college culture in strengthening the intersection between faculty members and assessment professionals. However, college structures for bringing individuals together on particular tasks also played a key role. Three theories of organizational workings foreshadowed themes in this study. First, the community of practice theory of social learning (Wenger, 1998) explained how professional development and collaboration played key roles in organizational learning, a primary goal of assessment. Learning within a community brought about mutual understanding. Second, measurement issues were the structural conditions that served as gateways or barriers to effective collaboration between
assessment professionals and faculty members (Peterson, 1999; Banta, 2002; Lopez, 2003). Third and finally, sense making (Weick, 1995) described the process through which the results of assessment and self-reflection could be transformed into organizational goals. Mutual understanding, structure, and process together formed the conditions in which the roles of these higher education practitioners would intersect.

*Mutual Understanding.* Professional development is a driving need within an organization undergoing rapid change (Bolman & Deal, 2003, p. 372), either because of internal feedback from learning assessment results or external accountability demands. Learning new assessment concepts and methods toward fulfilling accreditation requirements, for example, eases the tensions caused by the upheaval of faculty roles within the college during periods of change. The College was highly proactive in providing professional development opportunities to faculty and staff members. When a small group of faculty first began to study the process of learning outcomes assessment, one of their first activities was to distribute information about assessment from experts on teaching and learning, like Angelo & Cross (1993). Virtually all interview participants had something to say about their recent development experience, whether professional or formal educational.

Faculty members and others who take part in learning communities (Milton, 2004) document their systematic inquiries into student learning in courses and programs for the benefit of their institutions and their peers. Meaning, practice, community, and identity, the components of Wenger’s (1998) social learning theory, are exemplified by faculty learning communities. First, meaning can be either individual or collective, but the way people experience life and the world around them is continually changing. This
is particularly true for colleges transforming under external pressures. Second, practice “is a way of talking about the shared historical and social resources, frameworks, and perspectives that can sustain mutual engagement in action” (p. 5). It is through practicing the art of interpretation among multiple stakeholders that a college is able to connect its needs with resources that can meet those needs. Third, community lends value and recognition to individual and collective pursuits. By recognizing faculty and staff members who are assessment “success stories,” each member of the institution learns to place value on the effort. Fourth, identity provides a framework for considering individual growth in the context of one’s community. Faculty members who have taught for many years no longer need to feel that they’ve hit a plateau and can advance no further. Assessment for internal improvement provides mature faculty a means of continuing professional growth and improving stature. All of these experiences are available to faculty who actively share knowledge about assessment within local communities of practice. It is within this culture, with resource support from administrators and technical support from assessment professionals, that improving student learning outcomes through assessment activities becomes possible (Banta, 2004).

While Sunshine State Community College faculty had a semi-annual tradition, the colloquium, for uniting as a faculty learning community, the College had several structures and processes for uniting faculty with other constituents, as well. For example, a way in which the College created common ground for collaboration was by structuring deliberate activities over a number of years that made possible both thoughtful reflection about the college’s vision statement and the celebration of that vision. A college-wide activity addressed one particular “theme” each year, for which there were common
readings. The idea was for faculty to integrate that theme into as many classes as possible. A new theme was introduced to the college each Fall. Students were thus able to participate in activities that increased their engagement with faculty members while actively interpreting some aspect of the college’s vision. Another annual practice, the college awards ceremony, helped to ensure that extraordinary efforts of faculty and staff were recognized by College administrators. These practices within a community of learners thus provided meaning to the College vision and helped to enhance the identity of students, faculty, and staff alike through recognition and reward programs.

Structural Conditions. Bolman & Deal (2003) use the concept of reframing to understand the complex nature of organizations by looking at them from multiple perspectives. One such perspective comes from looking at colleges as if their organization charts defined them. Assumptions of the structural frame include management by objectives, division of labor, coordination and control, rational decision-making, form dependent upon task and technology, and structural change as a remedy for performance deficiency (Bolman & Deal, 2003). Restructuring may occur to accommodate changes in the environment, technology, growth, or leadership. In particular, changes to college organizational hierarchies often occur in response to accreditation requirements. Such was the case at Sunshine State Community College.

During the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), there was a continuous transformation of the organizational structure to accommodate tasks to be accomplished in three separate phases. The multiple structures, both vertical (steering) and horizontal (coordinating), made widespread inclusion and participation possible. Also, the QEP structure maintained a porous boundary. This enabled official members of
the Committee to bring other faculty and staff into dialog when appropriate. Several interviewees who participated in the QEP development process indicated that the process followed was indeed the way to complete a successful outcomes assessment plan.

However, while structure can prove a gateway to some, it can be a barrier to other individuals whose voices need to be heard in conversations about learning outcomes assessment. The elaborate structure of communications channels within academic affairs facilitated internal decision-making, but excluded institutional researchers from many dialogs on teaching and learning issues. Academic administrators and faculty viewed the horizontal and vertical lines of communication within the academic structure as a formula for engaging the academic community in dialog about student success. Academic administrators shared data on student success in a number of ways. First, administrators shared important findings with faculty though a colloquium each semester. Second, administrators shared data with the small group of direct reports in the division. In these meetings, information was used as a springboard for discussion about what could be done to improve areas that were troublesome. Third, administrators discussed data in weekly meetings of the Learning Management Team, composed of all managers who reported to the academic VP. Fourth and finally, administrators discussed data within the Learning Response Team, which added program facilitators (department chairs) to the circle. The Learning Management Team decided what information to share and which decisions needed to be made within these quarterly meetings. Thus, academic administrators filtered much of the information seen by the faculty, sometimes impeding the flow of dialog between faculty members and institutional researchers.
Process. Because new knowledge changes the old order of cultural foundations and political connections, colleges need to continually renew themselves by creating new culture and connections. In that case, people who work together engage in sense-making (Weick, 1979), a four-stage process. In organizing for this process of socially constructing meaning, people in an institution first experience something new in their environment (ecological change). In the second stage (enactment), they realize that the new phenomenon requires their attention. In the third stage, these occurrences take on a name (selection). This enables the college in the fourth stage to retain a common vocabulary and mutual understanding of what the occurrence means (retention). These constructed meanings filter people’s focus so that they see only these defined patterns within their environment, thus reinforcing socially constructed meanings.

This process can be seen by reflecting upon the timeline of events leading up to the college-wide endorsement of College Preparatory Education as the focus of the College’s Quality Enhancement Plan. In 2002, the Director of Institutional Research started to work with the program facilitator for communications (and his group) in examining data from a consultant-written longitudinal tracking system. Student enrollment, grades, and degree completion failures for so many students took faculty by surprise. To get students through prep and into credit-level courses successfully, they designed and implemented a number of instructional strategies in 2003, but found that the limited time they had to devote to maintaining these interventions was not enough to be helpful to students.

The Institutional Research office kicked off 2004 with a publication that compared the college’s performance to Florida-wide student performance on
accountability measures and grades in specific courses (What We Know About Student Learning). Several of these measures were focused upon college prep success. Later that year, faculty identified college preparatory education as the focus of the college’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) and other constituent groups affirmed this choice.

Had the Research Director not worked with faculty on learning outcomes assessment (and had the faculty not been frustrated in their efforts to help these students), the college preparatory education focus might never have been conceived. For example, it is entirely possible that environmental change (the failure of so many students) would not have been enacted (realized by faculty) through review of the longitudinal tracking reports and have been selected (given a name) by communications faculty in conversations with other faculty. With the publication of What We Know About Student Learning, faculty college-wide were able to retain (grasp the significance of the problem for student success) sufficiently to want to put college resources into helping students get through college prep.

Implications for Practice

The ideal program in developmental education should help all students, regardless of their level of competency when they enter college (Boylan, 2002). According to the National Association for Developmental Education, it helps “underprepared students prepare, prepared students advance, and advanced students excel” (p. 3). Important contributions that institutional researchers may make to developmental education programs are in the areas of strategic planning and program evaluation. The impact of community college collaboration between faculty and assessment professionals on these
“best practice” areas and implications for future practice is discussed in the following paragraphs.

*Strategic Planning.* According to Boylan, “developmental programs with written statements of mission, goals, and objectives had higher student pass rates in developmental courses than programs without such statements” (p.19). Further, students in such programs tended to pass state-mandated tests and continue their enrollment more often. The College vision statement emphasizing shared values, openness, and inclusion provided the backdrop for college planning efforts. The selection of college preparatory education as the focus of the Quality Enhancement Plan sent a message to students, faculty, and staff that the words in the vision statement rang true. The job of the Assessment Coordinator in the Office of Institutional Research (IR), therefore, was to ensure that the assessment plan stayed on track during the next five years.

However, the foundation of the QEP’s definition of developmental education outcomes was the set of six learning outcomes for all graduates (QEP Document, “Definition of Student Learning”, p. 27) that faculty debated, revised, and finally approved. The process for assessing these outcomes remained a work in progress, as the Jeff (Assessment Coordinator) admitted when asked about the relationship between QEP and general education assessments:

I think that the area of instruction needs to be looking at how they want to proliferate the learning outcomes process to the areas, whether that be vocational education, college prep, do they want to do a gen ed process in other areas? Well first, we’ve got to get our gen ed assessment completed and whole. We only did three of the six this year, so we really
need to go through and look at the other three. This is new territory. We’re dealing with locally developed instruments and we’ve found that in the past couple of years we’ve been very focused on the instrument development and refinement. (Interview with Jeff)

Faculty indicated that the general education outcome assessment for the “self-direction” competency had been problematic during the 2005 pilot. Beth and Geri implied in interviews that *self-direction*, defined as “those activities that reflect the college’s vision to encourage awareness through skills and behavior that lead to increased individual and community responsibility,” (Learning Outcomes Assessment Task Force Report, p. 7) was an important outcome of developmental courses, especially study skills courses. However, self-direction was one of the outcomes not assessed in 2006. Geri, who was coordinating the effort to achieve consensus on important outcomes among faculty teaching study skills courses for the QEP implementation, said that getting the group to establish a common course syllabus was a challenging task.

These twin problems may have had similar roots: lack of a common frame of reference based in scholarly literature or effective practices. The solution to this problem would be the same one used to determine best practices in developmental education in Phase I of QEP development: set aside time for collaborative research. An example of how this task could be structured came from the subcommittee on learning communities. There, faculty leaders solicited advice from a consultant in North Carolina with significant experience with learning communities and brought her to the college for a two-day workshop. Likewise, the college’s efforts to operationally define self-direction
would benefit from professional expertise. From a scholarly perspective, aspects of this outcome are similar to the notion that skill transfer can be improved by helping students become more aware of themselves as learners who actively monitor their learning strategies and assess their readiness for particular tests and performances.…

Metacognitive approaches to instruction have been shown to increase the degree to which students will transfer to new situations without the need for explicit prompting. (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 2000)

Metacognition is an important component of the master student course taught in many community colleges, along with study skills. Measuring the extent to which students were taking individual responsibility for their learning would be an important first step in developing an assessment for this outcome. Certainly, a consultation with an educational psychologist or experienced practitioner on this measure might serve to speed the development along.

Program Evaluation. “Few program components are more important than evaluation” (Boylan, 2002, p. 39). In community colleges, consistent reporting on the successes, failures, and problem of these programs institution-wide keeps developmental education visible, thereby reinforcing it as an institutional priority (p.23). Directly tied to this practice include concerns such as professional development for faculty and assessment staff and operational and policy changes needed to implement effective student learning outcomes assessment strategies. Activities related to student learning outcomes assessment have been accelerated in colleges because of accreditation-driven changes in community colleges nationwide.
At Sunshine State Community College, a working relationship between a program facilitator and the college’s institutional research officer developed in the process of studying and refining the Longitudinal Tracking System (a method of examining the subsequent success of students beginning in college prep). This process led to the early identification of appropriate selection criteria for examining longitudinal data on subsequent student success, an important QEP success measure.

**Process Evaluation.** Institutional Research (IR) worked closely with developmental educators to create measures for developmental education outcomes that would measure the effectiveness of the QEP over the next five years. Likewise, a general education outcomes assessment has been in development since 2004. However, these measures can only become the collective mirror in which educators view the successes of their courses and programs when faculty have become satisfied that assessments are producing reliable assessment data that can be used for program improvement.

**Structural Barriers.** Research Question 3 dealt with estrangements between faculty and assessment professionals. The filtering of information that occurred though the academic structures (Learning Management and Learning Response Teams) served a sense making function (Weick, 1995) in that only the assessment results that leaders considered important were ever discussed. However, these structures did not incorporate direct dialog between assessment professionals and faculty on college-wide issues. For example, Jeff indicated that much of his communication with faculty about outcomes was through reports and the Intranet. The exceptions to this rule were activities related to general and developmental education outcomes assessment. Faculty had little regular contact with IR staff, making dialog on assessment more difficult. In another example,
Terri described tense initial conversations between faculty and IR staff in trying to communicate in a common language about QEP assessment. IR staff sometimes suggested operational definitions for outcomes that they knew how to measure, rather than directly responding to the unfulfilled need to measure the “unmeasurable” expressed by a faculty member.

Short of moving IR into Academic Affairs, communications could be improved by engineering more structured interactions between faculty and IR staff. Examples of these interactions could be formal, such as joint participation on committees or task forces or informal, such as a presentation by IR staff to faculty, followed by a reception to encourage dialog about learning outcomes.

*Capacity for Reflection.* A systematic method of creating and sustaining learning communities within an institution is Collaborative Analysis of Student Learning (CASL) (Langer, Colton, & Goff, 2003). Rather than focusing upon a “best practices” one size fits all approach to professional development, the CASL process causes a teacher to engage in reflective inquiry when determining how to best help individual students over their learning hurdles. This self-awareness is a defense against “habituated perception” (p. 33), which occurs when teachers see only what they expect to see and miss important clues that could lead students to learning breakthroughs. According to Senge et al, the mechanism that causes this blindness is the teacher’s mental model (Senge, Kleiner, Roberts, Ross, & Smith, 1994) of how student learning takes place. It is only by verbalizing her thought processes with a supportive group of peers that the teacher’s assumptions can be discerned, challenged, and revised. Analysis of interviews showed
that both assessment professionals and faculty members at Sunshine State Community College were highly reflective in discussing their respective practices.

Evidence of the capacity for self-reflection could be found in the responses to the thought-provoking questions posed to both faculty and assessment professionals in individual and focus group interviews. Participants really reached down to find answers to the questions posed by this researcher in these interviews. Often a more complete answer to a previous question would emerge in later conversation, after the participant had time to think about it. Mary, in particular, was an enthusiastic proponent of reflection, both in her practice of teaching and as a component of curriculum.

While individual reflection is an important tool for better understanding one’s environment, the ability of faculty and staff members to participate in collaborative reflection or sense-making (Weick, 1995) is even more important to increasing the college’s capacity to use assessment results. According to Richard Voorhees, a past president of the Association for Institutional Research, an alternative job of IR is to feed networks (2003). New ideas may germinate in unpredictable ways from the seeds of ideas planted by a catalyst member. These networks innovate more often when they exist within active, diverse communities. Thus, in brokering knowledge about the results of outcomes assessment among networks of faculty and staff members, IR could help the college determine which results were important enough for planning and action.

**Faculty Assistance in Implementing Assessment.** Enhancing a faculty member’s predisposition to use assessment toward improved course performance is an important step in professional development that is often neglected. Although seminars on assessment techniques usually produce a lot of enthusiasm, Kurz and Banta (2004) found
that they could convince faculty of the value of using assessment with some individual
guidance from instructional experts. The researchers found pre-/post- measures to be
effective in providing clear and convincing evidence of changes in students’ learning.
Further, some participating faculty remarked that students “spontaneously expressed
gratitude for the feedback provided by the assessments, and others commented that their
students clearly felt empowered by these experiences” (p. 93). The conclusion of the
study was that successful classroom assessment should be “simple and closely tied to the
course and its learning experiences” (p. 93).

Sunshine State Community College could use a “train the trainer” approach to
developing a team of such instructional experts among faculty leaders in developmental
education who could assist other faculty members in adopting assessment practices. A
number of faculty interviewed for this study talked at length about their experiences
using classroom assessment for learning improvement. For example, Mary used portfolio
assessment in one of her classes to great effect:

I guess I have as much freedom as I need right now independently
in my individual courses to use various tools of assessment. Let me give
you one example: In my class in the last year, I’ve changed the final exam
to a creative project. And it is so good! I wonder if I have an example
here. I do. The final exam now is no longer just a test. The students are
asked to create a matrix. The student are asked to create a chart, a
diagram, a PowerPoint presentation – however they want to do it - but the
rules are: they have to connect the themes that they’ve discovered in the
course they’ve just taken, and they connect the writers and the words
underneath each of the themes so that they recognize large order to small order categories and connections amongst and between the writers. And I just think it’s absolutely wonderful for several reasons in assessment: 1. They have to review, without being told to review. 2. That kind of critical reflection is just invaluable for students – you don’t even have to call it critical reflection – you know they’re doing it. 3. They have to organize the project – They have to use their higher level thinking skills of analysis and synthesis and evaluation just to put it together. Here’s what I’ve learned. Look, here’s what I’ve mastered. That’s a whole different way to assess students’ learning. It’s much more holistic – it’s a way to assess deeper student learning. I think that’s where we need to go. I think the real outcomes assessment looks at deep learning, not just what’s on the surface. (Interview with Mary)

Mary also taught developmental courses in writing and would have been a natural “instructional expert” if provided course release time to assist other faculty in making incremental instructional changes within their classrooms.

Other ways of moving program assessment results into classrooms would be to enhance opportunities for interaction between faculty members and assessment professionals beyond the College’s twin learning outcomes assessment processes (e.g., general education and QEP). While Michelle, Dean of AA Programs, had come to rely upon Institutional Research to drive instructional change, this relationship had developed through exchanges of information over time:
It’s like a natural instinct now, when five years ago, people weren’t sure what to do with the data or why they were even being allowed to see it. Now it’s totally different because they’re wanting the information, they’re wanting… I have a math faculty member who I was having lunch with (working on other stuff- it was a working lunch) who was talking about something that she’s doing in her math class and she’s saying I really want to track these students to see if it made a difference when I was in the classroom. So here she is already thinking about “OK, I need to be tapping into this data to see if this change was a good change - Do I need to continue doing this?” People are just kind of automatically thinking about that when they talk about change.

By getting to know the Institutional Research staff on a personal level as Michelle did, faculty members could become more likely to interact with them directly on measurement issues, further accelerating the College’s progress in using the results of assessment.

Another way the college could convert the assessment results into instructional change would be to have an instructional coordinator work through the college’s center for teaching and learning excellence in partnership with institutional research. The contributions of a faculty peer in promoting the use of assessment results might help to transform outcomes reporting to formats that are more meaningful, and therefore more frequently read and talked about in faculty circles.
Implications for Research

How could future research “extend, clarify, broaden, or deepen this strand of research further” (Blank, 1996, p.2, Doctoral Dissertation/ Ed.S. Project Specifications)?

Strengthening the findings of this study, direct field observation of a post-assessment conference with assessment professionals and faculty would allow a closer look at the process of sense-making (Weick, 1995) among assessment practitioners. The study could probe the question of how collaborative groups determine which assessment findings are important enough to be actionable.

Expanding the field of study into other departments of the college, the strongest developmental education programs used a collaboration between faculty and student advisors to monitor and intervene in matters affecting student performance – whether cognitive or affective (Boylan, 2002, p.58). As this best practice in developmental education has not been a primary focus of this research, future studies could focus upon cross-functional collaborations involving institutional research, faculty, and student services staff. As many of these collaborations are intended to solve the problems of individual students, a potential research question for future study could be at what point do such collaborations identify a repeating problem as a research need and what process do they go through to articulate research questions? This strand of future research would be a more in-depth investigation into sense making (Weick, 1995) activity within cross-functional groups.

Another related area of potential research concerns the critical underpinnings of collaboration on assessment, the resources (e.g., time, money, resources) invested in them (Peterson, 1999; Banta, 2002; Lopez, 2003). Although interviews with faculty and
assessment professionals at Sunshine State Community College support this need, the quantity and quality of resources directed at learning improvement were not primary targets of this research. Future research efforts could thus be focused upon the nature and level of resources as a determinant of a successful learning outcomes assessment program.

One last potential area for future research bears directly upon the conclusion of this study. If colleges wish institutional researchers to play a greater role in drilling the results of assessment down to classroom instructional strategies, should the analytical role of the assessment professional (acknowledging and recommending) continue to stand aloof from that of the faculty member (implementing and monitoring)? A second related question would ask whether assessment was more effective in colleges where assessment coordinators were organized under academic affairs, rather than administration. If structure should follow task, as indicated by Bolman & Deal (2003), this might indeed be the case.

With the mandate for continuous improvement enshrined in accreditation principles nationwide, providing faculty and assessment professionals with the conditions for effective collaboration will be a continuing concern for college administrators for many years to come. It will also be the source of research questions for higher education researchers for at least that long.
References


Bibliography


Appendices
Appendix A

Individual Interview Consent Form

Informed Consent

Social and Behavioral Sciences
University of South Florida

Information for People Who Take Part in Research Studies

The following information is being presented to help you decide whether or not you want to take part in a minimal risk research study. Please read this carefully. If you do not understand anything, ask the person in charge of the study.

Title of Study: Creating an Assessment Culture to Enhance the Quality of Developmental Reading and Writing: A Community College Case Study

Principal Investigator: Pat Gordin

Study Location(s): [Sunshine State Community College]

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have recently collaborated with other faculty and assessment professionals on student learning outcomes assessment to improve students’ developmental reading or writing success

General Information about the Research Study

The purpose of this research study is to better understand the development of a culture of assessment among faculty and assessment/ institutional [research] staff members in improving students’ developmental reading and writing success.

Plan of Study

Individual Interview: The data collection portion of the study is expected to last two months, from February through March 2006. During that time, the principal researcher will arrange convenient times for interviewing faculty members (full-time and part-time) who teach reading, writing, or study skills development and any assessment/ IE staff members or leaders who may be able to provide background and insights into the study’s purpose. Interviews will take place at the work location of each participant, at pre-arranged times. The interviews may last up to one hour and voice responses will be recorded on a tape recorder and/or digital medium. Within two weeks of an interview, the researcher will provide a written summary to each participant for verification and correction of the voice data collected. She will then follow up with a phone call to you to collect and record any corrections you wish to provide.

Payment for Participation

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.
Appendix A (Continued)

Benefits of Being a Part of this Research Study

By participating in this study, you may increase your awareness of the social learning aspects of collaboration on assessment. Important findings from this study will be shared with College faculty and staff members. Institutional [Research] will receive a copy of the final dissertation.

Risks of Being a Part of this Research Study

There is minimal risk involved to participants of this study. A foreseeable risk, however, is the possibility that an emergency may necessitate the cancellation and re-scheduling of an interview.

Confidentiality of Your Records

Your privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the extent of the law. Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human Services, and the USF Institutional Review Board, its staff and other individuals acting on behalf of USF, may inspect the records from this research project. The results of this study may be published. However, the data obtained from you will be combined with data from others in the publication. The published results will not include your name or any other information that would personally identify you in any way. At the start of your personal interview, you will be asked to provide a pseudonym that will be used to identify any information you provide. The principal researcher and her major professor will have access to interview recordings and transcriptions, which will be stored in a locked drawer in the office of the principal investigator.

Volunteering to Be Part of this Research Study

Your decision to participate in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free to participate in this research study or to withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty or loss of benefits you or the College are entitled to receive, if you stop taking part in the study.

Questions and Contacts

- If you have any questions about this research study, contact Pat Gordin at (239) 489-9008 (work) or (239) 495-2969 (home).
- If you have questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in a research study, you may contact the Division of Research Compliance of the University of South Florida at (813) 974-5638.
Appendix A (Continued)

Consent to Take Part in This Research Study

By signing this form I agree that:

- I have fully read or have had read and explained to me this informed consent form describing this research project.
- I have had the opportunity to question one of the persons in charge of this research and have received satisfactory answers.
- I understand that I am being asked to participate in research. I understand the risks and benefits, and I freely give my consent to participate in the research project outlined in this form, under the conditions indicated in it.
- I have been given a signed copy of this informed consent form, which is mine to keep.

_________________________________________ _______________________________________
Signature of Participant Printed Name of Participant Date

Investigator Statement

I have carefully explained to the subject the nature of the above research study. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the subject signing this consent form understands the nature, demands, risks, and benefits involved in participating in this study.

_________________________________________ _______________________________________
Signature of Investigator Printed Name of Investigator Date
Or authorized research investigator designated by the Principal Investigator
Appendix B

Focus Group Interview Consent Form

Informed Consent

Social and Behavioral Sciences
University of South Florida

Information for People Who Take Part in Research Studies

The following information is being presented to help you decide whether or not you want to take part in a minimal risk research study. Please read this carefully. If you do not understand anything, ask the person in charge of the study.

Title of Study: Creating an Assessment Culture to Enhance the Quality of Developmental Reading and Writing: A Community College Case Study

Principal Investigator: Pat Gordin

Study Location(s): [Sunshine State Community College]

You are being asked to participate in this study because you have recently collaborated with other faculty and assessment professionals on student learning outcomes assessment to improve students’ developmental reading or writing success.

General Information about the Research Study

The purpose of this research study is to better understand the development of a culture of assessment among faculty and assessment/institutional [research] staff members in improving students’ developmental reading and writing success.

Plan of Study

Focus Group Interview: The data collection portion of the study is expected to last two months, from February through March 2006. During that time, the principal researcher will convene a focus group to discuss the process of data analysis and interpretation in assessment. Members of this group will include faculty members (full-time and part-time) who teach reading, writing, or study skills development and any assessment/ [IR] staff members or leaders who may be able to provide background and insights into the study’s purpose. This interview will take place at the work location of the participants, at a pre-arranged time. The interview may last up to one hour and voice responses will be recorded on a tape recorder and/or digital medium.

Payment for Participation

You will not be paid for your participation in this study.

Benefits of Being a Part of this Research Study

By participating in this study, you may increase your awareness of the social learning aspects of collaboration on assessment. Important findings from this study will be shared
Appendix B (Continued)

with College faculty and staff members. [Institutional Research] will receive a copy of
the final dissertation.

**Risks of Being a Part of this Research Study**
There is minimal risk involved to participants of this study. A foreseeable risk, however,
is the possibility that an emergency may necessitate the cancellation and re-scheduling of
this interview.

**Confidentiality of Your Records**
Your privacy and research records will be kept confidential to the extent of the law.
Authorized research personnel, employees of the Department of Health and Human
Services, and the USF Institutional Review Board, its staff and other individuals acting
on behalf of USF, may inspect the records from this research project.
The results of this study may be published. However, the data obtained from you will be
combined with data from others in the publication. The published results will not include
your name or any other information that would personally identify you in any way.
The principal researcher and her major professor will have access to interview recordings
and transcriptions, which will be stored in a locked drawer in the office of the principal
investigator.

**Volunteering to Be Part of this Research Study**
Your decision to participate in this research study is completely voluntary. You are free
to participate in this research study or to withdraw at any time. There will be no penalty
or loss of benefits you or the College are entitled to receive, if you stop taking part in the
study.

**Questions and Contacts**
- If you have any questions about this research study, contact Pat Gordin at (239)
  489-9008 (work) or (239) 495-2969 (home).
- If you have questions about your rights as a person who is taking part in a
  research study, you may contact the Division of Research Compliance of the
  University of South Florida at (813) 974-5638.
Appendix B (Continued)

Consent to Take Part in This Research Study
By signing this form I agree that:

- I have fully read or have had read and explained to me this informed consent form describing this research project.
- I have had the opportunity to question one of the persons in charge of this research and have received satisfactory answers.
- I understand that I am being asked to participate in research. I understand the risks and benefits, and I freely give my consent to participate in the research project outlined in this form, under the conditions indicated in it.
- I have been given a signed copy of this informed consent form, which is mine to keep.

_________________________ ________________________________________
Signature of Participant Printed Name of Participant Date

Investigator Statement
I have carefully explained to the subject the nature of the above research study. I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge the subject signing this consent form understands the nature, demands, risks, and benefits involved in participating in this study.

_________________________ ________________________________________
Signature of Investigator Printed Name of Investigator Date
Or authorized research investigator designated by the Principal Investigator

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Dear QEP Team and Communications Faculty:

The experiences you’ve shared with other faculty and staff members in building your College’s Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP) have provided you with unique expertise. Your college, by virtue of its SACS reaffirmation schedule, placed you on the frontier of knowledge in conducting student learning outcomes assessment for the improvement of developmental reading and writing.

I invite you to share some of that expertise with me as I investigate the ways in which assessment support and collaboration work best. You see, I am the institutional effectiveness director at Edison College, and I would like nothing more than to share this knowledge with your institution, mine, and others. The title of my dissertation is “Creating an Assessment Culture to Enhance the Quality of Developmental Reading and Writing: A Community College Case Study.” I am close to completing my Ph.D. in Curriculum and Instruction (with a specialization in Higher Education) at USF.

What you should know about this research is that I hope to meet with faculty members at your college, full- and part-time, who teach developmental reading, writing or study skills. I also want to meet with others involved in the development of the QEP. My meeting with you would take place at your convenience (in February or March) on your campus. The meeting would last not more than an hour.

If you will consider participating, please send me an e-mail message at pgordin@edison.edu. I can also be reached at Suncom 724-1008 or (239) 489-9008 (work) or (239) 495-2969 (home). You may discontinue participation at any time by calling or e-mailing me.

Thank you!
About the Author

Patricia Gordin received a Bachelor’s Degree in Psychology (with a minor in Child Development) from Rockford College in 1973, MBA from University of South Florida in 1993, and M.Ed. in Curriculum and Instruction (Educational Technology concentration) from Florida Gulf Coast University in 1999. She has been involved with community college institutional research since 1994, currently serving as District Director of Institutional Effectiveness and Program Development for Edison College, located in Southwest Florida.

Ms. Gordin has served in many statewide organizations including the Research Committee of the Florida Community College System and The Florida Association for Institutional Research (2004 President). She also served as the Chair for the Florida Association of Community Colleges Institutional Effectiveness Commission in 2005 and 2006. In her leadership of these organizations, she has hosted or co-hosted numerous conferences on institutional research and effectiveness issues and was a presenter at the 2005 Annual Conference of the Florida Association for Institutional Research in Orlando.