

Case Studies of Five Selected State Government and Three Regional Accreditation Association's Higher Education Assessment Policies and Practices



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CHAPTER ONE: OVERVIEW

Introduction

During the past decade the lion's share of the public's interest, and consequently, the attention of the media, scholars, and policymakers has been devoted to standards and assessment reforms in K-12 education. In higher education, public financing and affirmative action have occupied the vast attention of policymakers. While such issues as merit scholarships, income tax credits, and college access and admissions have dominated postsecondary policymaking at the state level, higher education assessment policies and regional accreditation assessment standards have been operating underneath the radar. Despite their relative invisibility, however, state assessment policies and regional accreditation assessment standards and criteria have emerged and matured as integral components of governance and quality assurance in higher education.

This report presents case studies examining state government and regional accreditation association policies guiding the assessment of student learning outcomes in higher education. The research was conducted by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI) and focused on the relationships among regional association standards, state assessment policies, and institutional practices for improving teaching and learning. The focus is upon lessons learned in five selected states and three regional accreditation associations concerning the development and enactment and implementation of various types of assessment policies that have proven to be effective. The case studies are presented in Chapter 2. Before presenting the case studies, the remainder of this chapter presents a brief analysis of the fifty states and the six regional accreditation associations in the United States, the rationale, purposes and criteria for selecting the states and accreditation associations, the methodology and the framework used in conducting the case studies.

The Current Status

The Fifty States

Since 1980 forty-four states have taken formal actions to institute policies and since 1986, all six regional accreditation associations have developed standards for assessing student outcomes. The majority of state policies were first enacted in the 1980s, although a fifth of the states did not develop policies until the 1990s. The focus of policies has generally been on improving accountability while simultaneously encouraging institutions to increase effectiveness, instructional quality, and student learning (Nettles, Cole, & Sharp, 1997).¹

State policies are often classified as being regulatory, reforming, or focused on either quality assurance or accountability. Table 1 presents the types of policies adopted by the states engaged in assessment activity. Eighteen of the states have policies designed to both ensure quality and hold colleges and universities accountable to higher authorities such as the governor, state legislature, or the coordinating or governing board and the general public. Eleven states have policies that focus exclusively on quality assurance; three emphasize accountability exclusively, while three others

¹ Nettles, M., Cole, J., & Sharp, S. (1997). *Benchmarking assessment: Assessment of teaching and learning in higher education and public accountability: State governing, coordinating board & regional accreditation association policies and practices*. NCPI Technical Report #5-02. Palo Alto, CA: National Center for Postsecondary Improvement.

combine accountability with either regulatory or reforming objectives. Seven states have policies designed to achieve accountability, quality, and regulatory outcomes.²

Table 1: Types of Assessment Policies Evident in States

Policy Type	Number of States
Accountability	3
Quality Assurance	11
Accountability & Quality Assurance	18
Accountability & Reforming	1
Accountability & Regulatory	2
Accountability, Regulatory & Quality Assurance	7

The policies were also initiated in a variety of ways and from different parts of state governments. Some are the consequence of statutory action by state legislatures while others are the result of actions taken by state higher education boards and commissions. Table 2 reveals that the origin of the vast share of state policies (20) is SHEEO agencies. Fourteen states have policies mandated by legislative statute; nine others have policies that originated from a combination of state agency and legislative action. Also, five states have no state-level assessment policy.³

Table 2: Origination of State Policies

Origination	Number of States
Higher Education Agency	20
Statute	14
Combination of Policy & Statute	9

Although no direct correlation has been established between the type of higher education governance structure in a state and the content of its assessment policy, the states with governing bodies and relatively more authority (consolidated governing, regulatory and coordinating boards with budgetary and academic program oversight) more often have agency-enacted policies, while those with the weaker governing structures (advisory boards, planning agencies) more often have either legislated activity or none at all. Table 3 presents summaries of these findings.

Out of the 20 states with consolidated governing boards, 14 have assessment policies, three have assessment statutes, and two have combinations. Of the 21 states that have coordinating boards with regulatory authority, five have policies, nine have statutes, and six have combined origins. Of the four states with coordinating boards having advisory capacity, two have statutes, one has a combination; none originated via policy, while one has no state-level assessment activity. Finally, of the five states with planning agencies, four have no state-level assessment activity, although one state does have a policy initiated by the agency.⁴

² Ibid.

³ Ibid.

⁴ Ibid.

Table 3: State Higher Education Governance Structures & Policy Originations

Governance Type (in descending order of authority)	Number of States	Agency	Statute	Combo
Consolidated Governing	20	14	3	2
Coordinating/Regulatory	21	5	9	6
Coordinating/Advisory	4	0	2	1
Planning	5	1	0	0

Over the past 15 years, commonality among the indicators and instruments used at the state level to judge the quality of institutions has increased. Seventeen states apply common indicators across the colleges and universities, while eight prescribe common instruments. The trend is toward policymakers and legislators seeking means by which to compare institutions on performance data. There is also a trend toward four approaches that states use to finance and otherwise provide incentives to colleges and universities to implement assessment activities. They are: (1) performance funding; (2) budget lines for assessment activities; (3) student fees for assessment purposes; and (4) reimbursements to colleges and universities for assessment activities.⁵

Regional Accreditation Associations

The six regional accreditation associations have taken a variety of approaches to setting assessment standards. None of the accreditation associations mandates assessment processes or a single set of outcomes for its member institutions. They do, however, require member institutions to plan and carry out assessments with emphasis upon teaching and learning and the academic skills and competencies of undergraduate students. Associations such as North Central, Middle States, and the Western Association guide institutions in emphasizing student outcomes such as cognitive and affective learning and development, problem solving and analysis, critical thinking and reasoning, and disciplinary knowledge, but they primarily leave the definition and methods of measuring these outcomes to each institution. Without exception, the associations mandate documentation of institutionally identified outcomes and analysis of those outcomes, as well as demonstration of action taken based upon analysis.⁶

The regional accreditation processes and expectations of colleges and universities are more flexible and less prescriptive than state policies. Assessment is intended to be a continuous activity, and the use of longitudinal and multiple measures is generally considered to be more valuable than single-dimension approaches because they reflect the complexity of colleges and universities and the value of length of time for showing meaningful improvement. The use of both qualitative and quantitative approaches is considered to be important by all of the associations, while North Central also asks for both direct and indirect measures. The accreditation associations provide a broad list of possible approaches including alumni and employer surveys, course and professor evaluations, student satisfaction inventories, and course completion rates.

All six regional associations either implicitly or explicitly acknowledge that the distinct and diverse purposes and goals of their member institutions demand that they engage in a variety of assessment approaches and processes. For example, Middle States *Framework for Outcomes Assessment* states the following:

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

...it is an institution's prerogative to determine how best to implement assessment. In addition, institutions conceptualize, develop, and implement their outcomes assessment plans over time.

Also, the Western Association's task force report, *The Role of Accreditation in the Assessment of Student Learning and Teaching Effectiveness*, acknowledges that

Member institutions are in the best position to define their standards for student learning and teaching effectiveness in relationship to their unique circumstance, and...identify measures, strategies, and procedures for assessment of student learning and teaching effectiveness. No single method strategy, model, or approach is universally appropriate for assessing teaching and learning.

This commitment of regional accreditation associations to preserving institutional distinctiveness and autonomy provides perhaps the best explanation for why the outcomes standards and procedures employed by the six regional associations are so broad and flexible.⁷

Our analysis of regional accreditation standards/criteria and state policy documents revealed that the relationship among accreditation associations, states, and colleges and universities has grown in regularity and importance. Over one-third of the states indicated having a relationship with either their regional accreditation and/or disciplinary/professional accrediting associations or both, while four of the regional accrediting associations explicitly mentioned having a relationship with the state higher education agencies in their regions. Table 4 presents these relationships. For example, the *SACS Policies, Procedures, and Guidelines* handbook highlights the participation of representatives from governing, coordinating, and other state agencies with the Commission's visiting committees and directs that institutional self-studies and visiting committee reports be shared with the state agency. Also, the North Central Association's relationships are based on communications and exploring ways to work with the states. The strength and nature of such influences were difficult to fully discern when simply analyzing policy documents, but a pattern of interdependence and mutual influence between some state and regional accreditation associations is apparent.⁸

The Case Study Rationale

We have reviewed policies with an eye towards examining their content and intent and the formal roles and functions of various sectors of the higher education system carrying out the policies. But we have yet to understand the policy process in terms of how the policy addresses the political and educational agenda of the state and how it conforms to the culture and mores of the state higher education system. In order to learn more about the manner in which policies are created and implemented, the political structures and conditions in which they exist, and the outcomes they produce, we need to inquire, through site visits and case studies, into how and in what specific ways the regional accreditation association standards and criteria have influenced state policies, and how state assessment policies have shaped institutional practices. Case studies are needed to understand the elements of the policies and standards that produce desired outcomes.

⁷ Ibid.

⁸ Ibid.

Table 4: Regional Accreditation Association/State Relationships

Association	Relations with States Evident?	Type/Form of Relationships
SACS	Yes	Joint participation in visits/Information sharing
NCA/HLC	Yes	Communication and joint projects
MSA/CHE	Yes	Updates on activities
NEASC	Yes	Notification of evaluation / Staff observers
WASC	No	None evident
NWASC	No	None evident

To this end, our research team has been inquiring deeply into the policy processes of five states and three regional accreditation associations. Knowing more about the process of development, formation, and implementation has given us more insight into the state assessment policies and regional accreditation association standards. For these reasons, we elected to conduct case studies in order to dig deeper into the underlying rationale for policy design, methods of implementation, and reasons for the outcomes produced.

Purpose

The primary objective of our case study research was to learn more about the impact of state policies and regional association standards upon the assessment practices of postsecondary institutions and their academic programs. To do this, we examined higher education assessment policies that have been adopted and implemented during the past two decades by five state governments and three regional accreditation associations. This report includes the case analyses, offers a synthesis of these, and then presents our analysis and findings.

A synthesis of the cases is presented in order to highlight the common themes among the cases and to feature the exceptional aspects of each case. We examined the inter-relationships of three levels: the state policies, the regional accreditation association standards, and the student assessment practices in affected colleges and universities. The emphases are on examining initial policy objectives, how the policies are implemented, and the resulting outcomes. The interactions among different policy levels is an important factor in the evolution of assessment practices and provides insight into why policies are either successful or produce different or even unexpected outcomes.

Selection of Case Studies

The five states that were selected for case studies were Florida, Missouri, New York, South Carolina, and Washington. These states were selected based upon three criteria: (1) the degree of higher education policy centralization in the state; (2) being located in one of the regions of our selected regional accreditation associations; and (3) the extent to which the state played a pioneering role in a particular area of assessment and/or accountability policy.

States in different accreditation regions were sought in order to examine the interaction of assessment policies, accreditation standards and criteria, and institutions. Florida and South Carolina are members of Southern Association; Missouri is a member of North Central; New York is a member of Middle States; and Washington is a member of the Northwest Association. States from

the New England Association were not selected because state-mandated assessment activity in that region is very limited. The three accreditation associations included in this report are the Middle States Association, the Northwest Association, and the North Central Association.

States were also sought in which the assessment policies varied in terms of the centralization of the states' assessment approaches in order to analyze the effects of centralization (or lack thereof) on assessment. For our purposes, centralization was defined using several dimensions: higher education governance structure; the mechanism by which assessment is initiated (legislative statute, executive policy, or a combination of these); and the degree to which assessment indicators/outcomes are in a given state are common across institutions, varied, or a mixture of these. Florida has a consolidated governing board, assessment by statute, and common indicators. Missouri has a coordinating regulatory board with budget authority, assessment by combination of statute and policy, and mixed indicators. New York has a coordinating regulatory board with no statutory budget role, assessment by policy, and mixed indicators. South Carolina has a coordinating board with budget authority, assessment by statute, and common indicators. Washington has a coordinating board with budget review, assessment by policy, and varied indicators.

Conceptual Framework

For the purposes of the case study, the framework had three components: one for the policy process, one for the synthesis of themes, and one for the analysis of findings. A diagram of the framework is presented in Figure 1. Based upon prior research of policy documents,⁹ a survey of SHEEO administrators,¹⁰ and a review of the literature,¹¹ we identified the important issues to consider when analyzing policy development to include the beliefs and expectations of state policymakers, the SHEEO agency leadership, and the leadership of the colleges and universities regarding assessment and higher education performance. Also important are the relationships among these three types of actors, as well as the social, political, and economic contexts surrounding the policy process in the state.

The five state cases are presented in a process framework, which includes the inputs, processes, outcomes, and impacts of each state's assessment policy. It incorporates an analysis of the context for the policy, including its historical and political inputs, its effects, how successful it was,¹² as well as the policy type.¹³ This framework guided our processes for data collection and individual case analysis.

Policy Process Component

The primary component of the conceptual framework is the examination of the stages in the development of assessment policy. A process model facilitated the description and analysis of the critical factors comprising the formation and enactment of each state's assessment policy. Palumbo illustrated that examining the development of the policy over time is critical because public policy is

⁹ Nettles, Cole, & Sharp (1997).

¹⁰ Nettles, M.T. & Cole, J.J.K. (1999b). *State higher education assessment policy: Findings from second and third years*. Stanford, CA: National Center for Postsecondary Improvement.

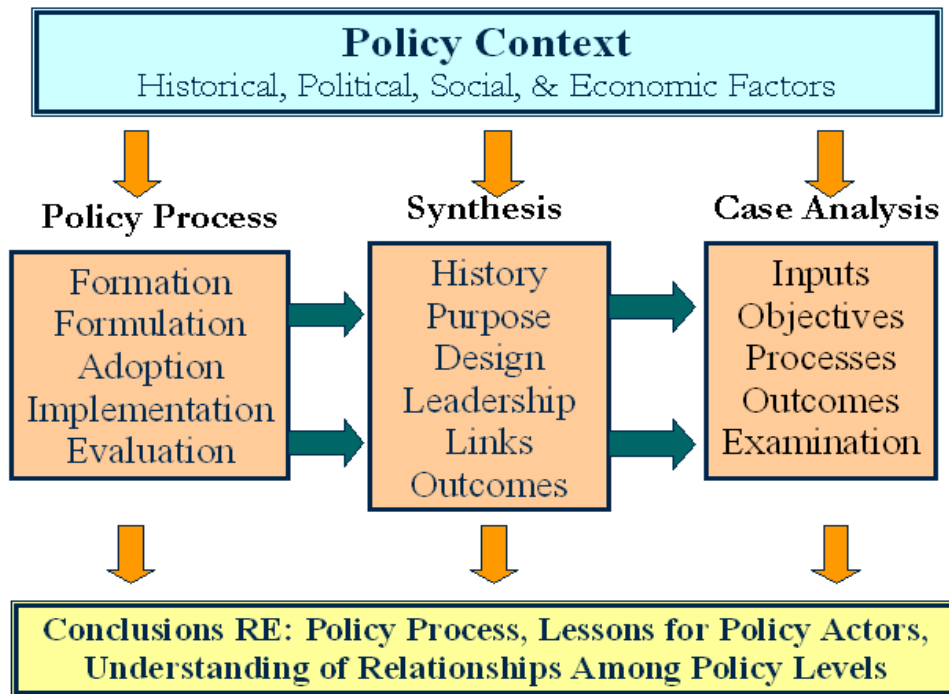
¹¹ Nettles, M. and Cole, J. (1999a). *States and public higher education: Review of prior research and implications for case studies*. NCPI Deliverable #5130. Palo Alto, CA: National Center for Postsecondary Improvement.

¹² Dubnick, M., & Bardes, B. (1983). *Thinking about public policy: A problem-solving approach*. New York: Wiley.

¹³ Lowi, T. (1972). American business, public policy, case studies, and political theory. *World Politics*, 16, 677-715.

considered a process of government activity that takes place over many months and years rather than merely a single event, decision, or outcome. He also presented a five-stage model for the process of policy formation, outlining critical events that serve to move policies through each stage.¹⁴

Figure 1: Conceptual Framework for State Analysis



Our model is adapted from the six stages outlined by Anderson and his colleagues, which presented stages using similar critical events, but also supplied the stages with descriptors.¹⁵ Anderson’s original framework identified six stages in the policy process for any policy domain: (1) problem identification; (2) agenda setting; (3) policy formulation; (4) policy adoption; (5) policy implementation; and (6) policy evaluation. Because the “agenda setting” stage was found not to be applicable to the state higher education assessment policy domain, we did not include it as part of this analysis and interpretation. Our policy process model for higher education identifies five stages in the development process for state assessment policies:

Problem Formation – The period when the need for a state-level assessment policy was first recognized;

Policy Formulation – Development of pertinent and acceptable proposed courses of action for dealing with public problems;

¹⁴ Palumbo, D. J. (1988). *Public policy in America: Government in action*. San Diego, CA: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, Publishers.

¹⁵ Anderson, J. E., Brady, D.W., Bullock, III, C.S., & Stewart, Jr., J. (1984). (2nd Ed.). *Public policy and politics in America*. Monterey, CA: Brooks/Cole.

Policy Adoption – Development of support for a specific proposal such that the policy is legitimized or authorized;

Policy Implementation – Application of the policy to the problem;

Policy Evaluation – Attempt by the state to determine whether the policy has been effective.

The case narratives for this component of the conceptual framework outline the policies in each of the states, and describe the events in their development, the dynamics surrounding them, and the influence of important policy actors on the final design. Also, the discussion examines how the policy moved from formulation to implementation, obstacles in the process, as well as reflections on what evaluation efforts revealed and what changes were considered.

Case Syntheses Component

State Approach

In the second component of the framework, states were compared along six dimensions that describe the critical content from the case studies. These dimensions flow from the questions outlined in the conceptual framework and seek to provide greater detail on the crucial aspects of the policies. The dimensions also allow for a better cross-case analysis as well as for the examination of the connections between levels of assessment policy. The six dimensions for comparison and analysis are:

- History & Originating Dynamics of the Policy – includes a discussion of why the policy was initiated and what state action led to its development
- Purpose & Objectives – outlines the intentions of the policy and the state’s policy priorities
- Design & Features – addresses how the policy functions after implementation, including data collection and measurement
- Leadership & Management – examines the roles and actions of policymakers, institutional representatives, and the state agency
- Outcomes and Effects – summarizes the actual results from the policy, as well as their implications
- Conditions Shaping Policy Outcomes – analyzes how the policy objectives were made actionable and the extent to which they were achieved. Also, different or unexpected outcomes are discussed. This analysis includes an examination of how the policy contexts influenced the outcomes, as well as the significance of policy design, implementation structures or barriers, and the actions of political or institutional players.

In addition to these, a conclusions section is presented that discusses the overall effectiveness of the state policy, what changes might be appropriate for improvement, and what aspects of these policies were successful.

Regional Association Approach

The regional accreditation associations were selected in order to study their policies and standards for the emphases they place on improving student learning and achievement as a requirement for accreditation. The standards and criteria of the associations are analyzed along the following six dimensions:

- The history and dynamics of the policy's development.
- The criteria and approach set forth for institutional accreditation regarding assessment and the requirements.
- The methods and processes for assessment that the associations prescribe for institutions, including reporting, testing, and data collection.
- The institutional support offered to campuses as they implement these requirements, including training, resources, and services.
- The relations with state agencies, which includes the influence of the association on institutions, and the coordination, cooperation, communication between the association and state higher education agencies.
- An evaluation of the association's policy and include a review and reflection upon its effectiveness.

The discussion of the regional associations provides a review of the associations' focus on assessment for improving learning and teaching, the kinds of outcomes measured and processes used, and institutional accountability vs. institutional autonomy. Also, to understand the associations' engagement with assessment, the analysis also includes the relationship of association to state higher education department, its willingness to work with institutions to meet the criteria, and the association's efforts to evaluate its assessment program.

Case Analysis Component

The third component of the conceptual framework is analytical. It examines the outcomes of the policies in light of the stated objectives. In earlier research, Nettles & Cole (1999a; 1999b) showed how the states seek to meet a variety of objectives with their assessment policies, from improving student learning to holding institutions accountable for their effectiveness. The objectives for assessment policy and accreditation standards are significant because they reflect policymakers' perceptions of the academic results and standards of performance that colleges and universities should be achieving. Assessment policy objectives also reveal priorities that have consequences for institutional behaviors/decisions.

Objectives only tell half of the policy story, however. Equally important (and revealing) is an analysis of the intended and unintended outcomes. While a state may have stated objectives for its assessment policy, those objectives are not always achieved, or if they are, there may also be additional outcomes. This distinction between stated policy objectives and outcomes is important, particularly for understanding the dynamics of the policy process at the state level. This distinction has also been addressed in the policy analysis literature. An effort has been made to distinguish

between intentional analyses, which focuses on what was or is intended by a policy, and functional analyses, which focuses on what actually happened as a result of a policy.¹⁶

Our goal is to compare the intended and the actual outcomes of the policies, while also attempting to describe the key factors that led to these outcomes. This component of our framework examines the connection between policy objectives and outcomes. It addresses the following questions:

What political circumstances in the state led to the adoption of the policy?

What entities and factors influenced the policy content?

What was the quality of the relationships between colleges and universities and the state government at the time the assessment policy was developed?

This policy context element is concerned with the historical, social, and economic inputs related to the policy's origin, such how the awareness of a new policy or a change in an existing one was created. Included also were political inputs, such as the governance structure for higher education that was present in a state or the original legislation or political action leading to the development of an assessment policy. The relationships and communications among the governing agencies, the state governments, and the institutions are also key factors in understanding the policy context.

What were the primary objectives of a state's assessment policy?

What priorities were identified in the policy?

The states and regional accreditation associations have a variety of reasons for adopting assessment policies and standards, and they are designed to meet a variety of objectives. The intentions of a policy include the following: to increase public or fiscal accountability; to improve college teaching or student learning; to promote planning or academic efficiency on campus; to facilitate inter-or intra-state comparisons; and to facilitate the reduction of program duplication.

What were the institutional, political, and financial results of this policy?

How were the institutional, political, and financial results different from those that were expected?

Although a state may have clearly articulated objectives for its assessment policy, those objectives may or may not always be met in practice. There may be important interactions between the objectives; some may complement one another while others might have been at cross-purposes. A policy could have a design including elements that link objective to successful outcomes, while others might face structural or procedural barriers during implementation that undermine their potential. Alternatively, a policy might produce unintended or unexpected outcomes, thereby creating new problems or exacerbating old ones. The distinction between policy objectives and outcomes is significant for understanding the best methods for developing and implementing policy.

¹⁶ Dubnick & Bardes, 1983.

How did the interactions among state government officials, the SHEEO agencies, and institutional representatives contribute to these outcomes?

What policy design and structural elements were significant in producing the outcomes?

What contextual factors in the political and social climate for assessment are relevant?

What explanations are possible for any disjuncture between objectives and outcomes?

Our conclusions reflect on the performance of the policy and its effects on assessment practices among institutions. The intent is to determine whether states had been successful in improving teaching and learning, and the reasons for the outcomes. Identifying the relevant factors allow us to highlight the lessons that might be applicable to other states. This analysis considers the interactions between the various policy actors and the differing levels at which policy is affected, e.g., the state, regional, and institutional levels.

Methodology

The case study site visits typically involved a two-day visit by our research team. The team consisted of NCPI personnel and external consultants who were familiar with state assessment policy issues. The team interviewed higher education policymakers and their key staff members who had been the most active in the areas of assessment and accountability in the state. The goal was to create an opportunity for dialogue about the history and important components of the assessment policy, and how it was being implemented and evaluated. The team was particularly interested in aspects such as the academic components, fiscal components, and governance of the policy, as well as the inter-relations that are involved among legislators, the executive branch, governor's office, the Board of Education, and the colleges and universities. The team was also interested in how the state policy makers thought the policies influenced teaching and learning in the state's colleges and universities.

The site visits involved meeting with the SHEEO Chief Executive Officer, the Chief Academic Officer, the Chief Fiscal Officer, the lead staff person for community and vocational institutions and for colleges and universities, the Chairs of the House and Senate Education Committees, key staff in the governor's office, and any individuals or groups from institutions who are involved in assessment activity.

The Case Study Protocol

Based on the findings from the State Higher Education Administrator Questionnaire SHEAQ,¹⁷ and a review of the literature associated with state involvement with assessment and higher education governance¹⁸, we developed a protocol for the case studies. The protocol is presented in Appendix A. The protocol was designed to elicit both general and specific information from the policy experts in the states and regional accreditation associations regarding the development of their policy, criteria, and standards. The exact nature of case study questions and the topics discussed during the site visits varied depending on the political structures and circumstances at work in those states or associations. There are five primary elements to the protocol, each comprised of related topics:

¹⁷ Nettles, M.T. & Cole, J.J.K. (1999b).

¹⁸ Nettles, M.T. & Cole, J.J.K. (1999a).

The origin of the assessment policy

- Historical overview
- External influences
- Primary policy actors
- Reasons for adoption

The codification of the assessment policy

- Relevant gubernatorial or legislative action
- Key provisions of the policy
- Goals of the policy, including how they were defined
- Institutional involvement
- Budgeting, financial considerations, and effects

The implementation of the state assessment policy

- Process for enactment
- Supporters and opponents
- Audience for policy
- Political and organizational structures for support
- Effects and observed changes
- Effects on relations/communications between governing boards, governor/legislature, and institutions
- Political will for continuation of policy
- Effects on teaching and learning at institutions

The data and information systems used in policy implementation

- Indicators and instruments
- Process of decision regarding the indicators and instruments used
- Databases and analyses
- Reports and sharing of information among the policy actors
- Observed effects

The evaluation of the assessment policy

- Formal reflections on policy effectiveness
- Measures for effectiveness
- Evaluation results
- Changes under consideration

The protocol was designed to capture the perspective of state government officials and legislators involved in the development, oversight, and evaluation of each state's assessment policy. These questions were designed to elicit information about the following:

- Their general level of knowledge about the state assessment policy;
- Their perspective regarding the role the state assessment policy plays in the legislative process;
- The value of the assessment policy to the state; and,
- The future direction of state assessment policy.

Outline of the Report

The next chapter presents summaries of the five state and three regional association case studies. The states are summarized using the policy process component of the conceptual framework, and the narratives recount the development and evolution of the policies. Important events are highlighted to describe how each policy process began and moved through the stages of development.

The third chapter of the report contains syntheses of the state cases and draws comparisons between the cases along the common themes that emerge. This section attempts to clarify and summarize the types of policies in evidence from these cases, the commonalities and differences in their objectives, designs, data collection and testing requirements, and structures for producing intended outcomes, as well as any barriers to success that are evident.

The fourth chapter of the report describes the findings from our analysis of the state and regional accreditation association cases. The policies will be evaluated on their ability to link objectives to outcomes through the processes established and the actions of those involved in their implementation. We will also highlight those aspects of these policies and their implementation processes would be applicable to other states.

Although the findings from this study would not be generalizable to all states, there is the opportunity to derive lessons from these cases. Collectively, aspects from these cases could prove useful to officials involved in creating a new assessment policy, or to evaluate and adapt an existing one. Finally, the links between the association policies and those in the states will be discussed. This includes the interactions of various agencies and levels of policy establishment on one another and the ways that influence moves across the higher education assessment system.

CHAPTER TWO: CASE STUDIES

State Case Studies

New York

State Background and Overview

In New York, the Legislature, the state Department of Education and the State University of New York (SUNY) System all have control and authority over the public colleges and universities. Each one fiercely protects its traditional and substantive autonomy. The Board of Regents of SUNY, which is responsible for setting policy for all educational activities within the state, presides over the university and the state education department.¹⁹ The structural tensions between the state Department of Education and the SUNY System perhaps help to protect institutional autonomy.

In terms of public higher education, the sphere is divided between the two statutory public institutional governing boards: the Board of Trustees for the State University of New York (SUNY) System and the Board of Trustees of the City University of New York (CUNY) System, each with its own powerful political advocates and constituencies.²⁰ The Commission on Independent Colleges and Universities serves private institutions at the state-level.

Table 5: Higher Education in New York²¹

	Public		Private			
	4 Year	2 Year	4 Year	4 Year	2 Year	2 Year
			<u>Non-Profit</u>	<u>For-Profit</u>	<u>Non-Profit</u>	<u>For-Profit</u>
Institutions	47	44	168	10	26	27
Enrollment	334,500	231,790	433,170		21,510	

There are 322 institutions of higher education in New York. Almost half (168) are private, four-year, non-profit institutions. New York is home to 37 for-profit institutions, giving the proprietary schools a much larger presence than in most other states. Of New York's 91 public campuses, 47 are four-year and 44 are two-year institutions; combined, the public institutions enroll more than 565,000 students.²² The private and proprietary sectors also command respect in the state because of their numbers, enrollments, and political supporters.

In many ways, New York is a very complicated and dynamic environment in the nation for higher education assessment reform. New York is a member of the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges, which in recent years has taken an active role in assessment. New York is a national leader in the effort to link state assessment activities with regional accrediting association assessment requirements. Thus, the case study findings from New York reflect the experiences of a

¹⁹ Education Commission of the States (1997). State postsecondary education structures sourcebook: State coordinating and governing boards. Denver, CO.

²⁰ Ibid.

²¹ Higher education data from the Almanac Issue of *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, August 31, 2001.

²² Ibid.

state with an average degree of higher education policy centralization, seeking to work closely with its regional accreditation association to develop a consistent and effective assessment policies

New York State has two concurrent policies in effect, one instituted by the State's Department of Education and the New York Board of Regents and the other by the State University of New York (SUNY) system administration. The former policy is focused upon coordinating the assessment activities, results, and reporting of each institution's plans, while the latter has been focused upon assessing student performance in general education and major programs by helping institutions develop assessment procedures at the department and program levels.

Problem Formation

The state Commission on Higher Education has had quality assurance written into state law since the late 1960s. Part 52 is the section of the Regulations of the Commission of Education that contains standards for the "registration of postsecondary curricula" at all degree-granting institutions in New York state. All academic programs that lead to a degree, prepare graduates for professional licensure, or lead to a certificate or diploma must be registered with the Commissioner before they can be approved as organized programs of instruction. Institutions must submit documentation evidencing careful planning in their curricula, the goals and objectives for each academic program, and the review procedures they will use to assess the extent to which these goals and objectives are being achieved.²³

Also, in 1972, a doctoral program review process was instituted for New York based on the recommendations outlined in a report, "Meeting the Needs of Doctoral Education in New York State." This report was prepared by a commission charged by the Board of Regents with developing policy for present and future needs in NY doctoral-level study. Once established, the review process was overseen by the Doctoral Council, which consisted of provosts and deans from state institutions. The process featured assessment of programs by peer reviewers in the same discipline from other, highly-regarded institutions, who considered among other criteria the percentage of full-time versus part-time faculty, quality and quantity of faculty publishing, and the prestige of the undergraduate institutions of incoming doctoral students.

The dramatic expansion in the number of doctoral programs led to a program review process. The quality of the programs was always the first concern, but the need and the demand for the programs was also a consideration. However, in 1993, the review process became too expensive and was scaled back to include assessment by interview panels and site visits. In September 1997, the offices of doctoral program review and college and university evaluation were combined in an effort to streamline operations.

Until the 1990s, program registration and review of doctoral programs were the two primary assessment mechanisms in New York. This decade witnessed a flurry of activity related to higher education assessment in New York, including an ill-fated institutional "report card" initiative, which coincided with the "report card" phenomenon in other states across the U.S. In the wake of that initiative, three events in the late 1990s brought about the need for action regarding accountability.

²³ New York State Education Department. Invitation to comment on proposed amendments to Part 52 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education. <http://www.nysed.highered.gov/BIAE/invcomment.htm>

First, a survey conducted by the Office of Research and Information Systems in the State Department of Education revealed that the primary concern of the colleges and universities regarding assessment in the state was how to conduct them for the sake of institutional effectiveness. Accountability was a secondary concern to institutions. Second, the State Comptroller issued a report entitled “The Power Vacuum,” which stated New York lacked a clear, focused, and effective agenda for higher education. Third, the ascent of Republicans in 1994 to the control of the state government brought about pressure to make the colleges and universities more accountable.

At the SUNY system level, the primary impetus for general education and major assessment came in 1998 from a project by the SUNY Board of Regents to compile a list of courses required for graduation. The Regents outlined 30 credits worth of required courses in ten areas of general education necessary for graduation. In response to the Regents’ action, SUNY Provost Peter Salins established a task force in January 1999 to consider the means of assessing student performance in these required courses. This task force defined general education in greater detail, and developed an assessment plan. During the summer of 1999, the SUNY Associate Provost, Donald Steven, was charged with translating the task force’s recommendations into policy. A new task force was created to assist in establishing definite measures of student learning and to decide the methods for assessing students in these courses. The Associate Provost developed these methods into policy recommendations with specific measures for learning.

Policy Formulation and Adoption

In the SUNY system, the concept of performance indicators has a longer history than the general education and major field assessments. In the early 1990s, then-SUNY Provost, Joseph Burke, began exploring performance indicators and assessment approaches. Burke and SUNY pursued the performance indicators approach without a mandate from the state. Burke’s efforts resulted in a 1994 report of performance indicators that covered the following seven areas: 1) funding; 2) access to undergraduate education; 3) undergraduate graduation rates; 4) undergraduate quality; 5) work force development; 6) graduate education and research; and 7) institutional management. Public reporting on these performance indicators was done in the aggregate; no institutions were singled out in the data. “Private” reports that featured a great deal of institution-specific data were quietly shared with individual campuses by the SUNY Administration in the hope that the data would be used for improvement.

The Republican government in 1994 brought new changes to the SUNY system and issued a new Regents report, “Rethinking SUNY,” that questioned the need for a large system administration. As a result of this report, SUNY budgets and staff were cut, and Burke’s performance indicator system fell out of political favor. The new SUNY Chancellor, John Ryan, introduced his own accountability program in 1996, and gave the provost the responsibility for implementation. The provost established a task force in November 1996 to create a merit-based performance funding system. Initial efforts by the task force resulted in a list of 144 indicators across four major areas: student achievement; faculty achievement; academic robustness; and campus environment/climate. Salins did not publicly accept the report, however. Following this, he charged Gary Blöse, SUNY’s Acting Assistant Provost for Data and Analysis, with operationalizing this indicator system by developing tangible measures and an implementation plan.

Meanwhile, policy at the state level continued its development. Within the state government, Richard Mills was hired as Commissioner of Education in 1997 and established two

top priorities upon taking office: teacher education and outcomes assessment. Mills recruited Gerald Patton from the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS) to be Deputy Commissioner of Higher Education. He recruited Patton in large measure because of Patton's extensive experience related to outcomes assessment at the level of the regional accreditation associations. From the beginning, there was a clear effort to connect New York's state efforts and requirements with those of Middle States Association, New York's regional accrediting body.

In January of 1999 the State Education Department convened the Task Force on Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness. This task force consisted of approximately twenty people, including vice presidents of the colleges and universities, institutional researchers, and faculty. The goal was to "create an assessment paradigm through collaborative efforts that would profoundly influence the quality of higher education." The context for their recommendations was that institutional quality requires the regular assessment of institutional outcomes. The purpose of the report was to translate assessment requirements into effective paradigms and have a coordinated and coherent assessment policy that would work well for all institutions in the state.

In addition to the task force, a policy advisory group on outcomes assessment and institutional effectiveness was also established. This policy advisory group was chaired by the President of the New York Institute of Technology. The group consisted mainly of college and university presidents and sector heads who wanted to provide input into the decision-making process of the task force, but did not want to be directly involved in the day-to-day operations. A year into the process, a power struggle ensued between the task force and the policy advisory group, and to resolve the struggle, the two bodies were essentially collapsed into a single task force. The members of this task force were charged to think of the state as a whole—not divided into SUNY, CUNY, and the independent sector.

Within the new task force, three subcommittees were formed to examine particular dimensions of the assessment and effectiveness issue: the unique missions of the various institutions in New York; the articulation and coordination of efforts across the entire New York higher education structure; and the development of fair and effective criteria for assessment purposes. In terms of mission, all institutions with similar missions were part of a particular "mission cluster," and all institutions in that cluster would be assessed using common indicators. Assessment reports would be issued by mission cluster and by institution, in the hope that the data would be disseminated and interpreted by the media and the public in a valid and responsible manner. The emphasis on institutional missions came in large part from the independent sector, which did not want to be overwhelmed in this process by the SUNY and CUNY systems. The task force also expected to stress the need for cooperation with Middle States and the sharing of data to prevent the duplication of efforts and to lessen the reporting burdens on institutions.

With the task force's report as a guide, in the fall of 1999, the Office of Higher Education launched the Quality Assurance Initiative to develop specific recommendations for action in consultation with an Advisory Group on Quality Assurance, the chief executive officers of institutions of higher education and others. In September 2000, the Regents Committee on Higher and Professional Education accepted four recommendations for the Initiative. The recommendations addressed: (1) institutional improvement in student learning and effectiveness; (2) improving information for consumers; (3) improving information for policy makers and (4) reducing unnecessarily duplicative accountability requirements for colleges and universities.

Policy Implementation

The State Education Department (SED) was responsible for defining in measurable language the system devised by the task force, and winning the approval for the new approach in the New York State Legislature and among faculty on campuses throughout the state. The first recommendation in the Quality Assurance Initiative was that the Board of Regents should require each degree-granting institution to develop a comprehensive educational effectiveness plan and to submit evidence of its use to the commissioner upon request. To begin the implementation, the Office of Higher Education developed proposed amendments to Part 52 of the Regulations of the Commissioner of Education. The amendments would strengthen the existing assessment requirement for program registration by requiring demonstration of regular assessment of student success. Also, institutions would be required to develop educational effectiveness plans that reflected their system for assessment of student learning. Institutions would need to provide the Department with their educational effectiveness plans by January of 2003. The new language in the regulation defines assessment specifically and establishes parameters for the regular collection of data as being on a time cycle of five years or less.

The second recommendation calls for institutions to periodically make available statistical information prescribed by the commissioner for consumers on the Internet. Each institution may also publish explanatory background and additional statistics to reflect its distinctive mission and goals. The recommendation advises the Commissioner to establish a pilot project with a small number of volunteer institutions to finalize a list of required statistics, create publication guidelines, and produce sample reports. A proposed list of required indicators for Internet publication by each institution was compiled using those on which institutions already report to the commissioner, the federal government, or college guide publishers. This list will be the subject of further discussion with the pilot project participants. However, if the pilot project group concludes that currently reported data elements are not sufficient, other data elements may need to be considered.

The third recommendation is for the Board of Regents to regularly publish statistics and analysis about the status, performance, challenges, and needs of higher education to fulfill their statutory responsibilities regarding statewide planning, policymaking, and advocacy for higher education. The commissioner should use the Department's Higher Education Data System (HEDS) and other information sources to produce databases and reports that would serve the needs of the Regents, Education Department, the Governor and Legislature, other State agencies, New York's colleges and universities and the general public.

The fourth recommendation aims to eliminate unnecessary duplication, and calls upon the Regents to coordinate reporting requirements with the federal government and accreditation associations. The amendments would permit colleges and universities to develop a single educational effectiveness plan to satisfy the requirements of the Department, one or more accreditation associations and, if applicable, the administrations of the SUNY and CUNY systems. Also, the commissioner should reduce duplicative statistical reporting requirements for institutions by reducing data collection, conforming to national data definitions and advocating for common data definitions and coordination among external accountability agencies. Finally, the commissioner should establish data exchanges, to the extent feasible, to help institutions efficiently obtain student outcomes information that they do not possess but that they may be required to report by federal, state and accrediting agencies.

The SED seems to conceptualize the new assessment paradigm as a pyramid, with the state at the top, accreditation associations and state systems in the middle, and the colleges and universities at the base. This structure reflects the breadth of data needed at each level: wide and varied at the institutional level, narrower and limited at the state level. The new assessment paradigm has no connection to state appropriations and is therefore not be a performance funding policy. The decentralization in the system is evident by the fact that there are no common assessment instruments prescribed for institutions, and although significant multi-institutional databases are available, there is not a central database at the SHEEO level. Institutions are also expected to comply with the assessment regulations using funds from their existing budgets because the state is not providing resources.

The SED also makes it clear that this new assessment paradigm is not related to the assessment efforts of the SUNY and CUNY systems. At the system level, SUNY has been involved with assessment since 1989, when each SUNY institutions submitted campus assessment reports to the SUNY Central Administration. These reports addressed four dimensions of outcomes assessment: basic skills, general education, academic majors, and personal/social growth. SUNY institutions submit updates on an annual basis about their assessment activities and results. In CUNY, all institutions require students to take a comprehensive basic skills test in reading, writing, and mathematics. The State Education Department also keeps track of assessment programs at independent and proprietary institutions.

Evaluation and Adjustment

New York is currently in the implementation stage of this policy. New York was selected, in part, as a case study state because of its place in the policy cycle, and the unique opportunity to observe the adoption, implementation, and evaluation of the state's new assessment paradigm.

Conclusions

The SED is seeking to make assessment part of what institutions do to have their programs recognized by the state. Although the policy requires institutions to develop an assessment program, provide definitions of what is meant by assessment, and establishes timelines; it is leaving the specific methods up to each institution to decide. It is also proposing that the Board work with government and accreditation agencies to reduce duplication of effort and develop a coordinated system of data collection and reporting. Finally, the Board has been charged to use the Internet and other publicly available media to disseminate information regarding the quality of institutions.

The actions taken by SED are the most significant driving force for assessment and quality in the state. Most of the assessment initiatives for institutional improvement are contained within the expansions of state regulations regarding program registration. The task forces the SED has formed and the reports they generated have established the framework for a statewide, coordinated program of assessment. The Department is also moving toward a closer working relationship with accreditation bodies in particular disciplines as a means of assuring consistency in standards, as well as efficiencies in staff time and cost.

Clearly, the leadership at the state level has come from the New York Board of Regents and the State Education Department. The Board is the only state agency authorized by the U.S. Department of Education to act as a national accreditation body and as such, plays a significant role in the state's efforts at quality assurance in higher education. The Board also acts as the collector and distributor of information to policymakers and the public regarding the quality of colleges and universities.

One of the keys to the successful leadership of the SED has been its willingness to listen to the needs and wishes of the institutions and give genuinely thoughtful consideration to their requests. Institutions have been consulted and included in many of the decisions and recommendations made by the SED and have been even been able to reverse policies it deemed burdensome and unconstructive.

South Carolina

State Background and Overview

South Carolina is a member of the Southern Association of Schools and Colleges, a regional accrediting body with perhaps the longest history of involvement in assessment and accountability issues. The state has a high degree of higher education policy centralization, in large part the result of the State Legislature's growing frustration with the state's public higher education system. The higher education executive agency, the South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (CHE), was established in 1967 as the statutory coordinating agency for higher education and is authorized to direct policy initiatives on behalf of the legislature. There are 11 single-institutional governing boards for public institutions, while the Independent Colleges and Universities of South Carolina, Inc. functions as the organization for private colleges and universities.²⁴

There are 62 institutions of higher education in South Carolina (Table 6); of this number, 33 are public (12 four-year and 21 two-year campuses). There are also a significant number of private institutions, however, the for-profit sector has not yet grown substantially in the state. In 2000, over 153,000 students were enrolled in the state's public higher education system, and nearly 60% of these students were enrolled in four-year institutions.

Table 6: Higher Education in South Carolina²⁵

	Public		Private			
	4 Year	2 Year	4 Year	4 Year	2 Year	2 Year
			<u>Non-Profit</u>	<u>For-Profit</u>	<u>Non-Profit</u>	<u>For-Profit</u>
Institutions	12	21	23	0	1	5
Enrollment	87,110	66,385	28,810		1,320	

State appropriations to public higher education in South Carolina stood at \$880 million for the 1999-2000 fiscal year, which was up 8% from the previous year. From 1995-2000, state spending per FTE student at public four-year institutions had dropped \$131 million, while all the states in the Southern Regional Education Board averaged an increase of \$40 million. Institutions have relied on tuition increases as the primary means of off-setting the decline in state appropriations. In the most recent legislative session, the budget proposal threatened an appropriations cut of 11%, although this was later vetoed by the governor in the face of significant tuition increases announced by many institutions.²⁶

South Carolina attracted national attention with a Legislature-mandated move toward 100% performance funding in the late 1990s, making the state a pioneer in the use of the performance funding policy mechanism. The case study findings from South Carolina, then, reflect the experiences of a state where control over policy is highly centralized in the State Legislature, with membership in the nation's most assessment-active regional accrediting association, and undergoing a radical experiment in the use of performance funding policies.

²⁴ Education Commission of the States, 1997.

²⁵ The Chronicle of Higher Education, Almanac, 2001.

²⁶ Southern Regional Education Board. *SREB Fact Book on Higher Education*. Atlanta, GA. June 2001.

Problem Formation

The development of performance funding in South Carolina has three important chapters in its history. The journey toward performance funding in South Carolina began in 1987, when the (CHE) expressed concern over the perceived mediocrity and low prestige of South Carolina higher education, particularly in comparison to public systems in neighboring states. A statewide study by the Commission concluded that the state lacked a program to measure the effectiveness of its colleges and universities. The Legislature responded with Act 629 in 1988 (updated in 1995), mandating that institutions report data on institutional effectiveness to the CHE, in a format developed by the Commission. Specifically, Act 629 required institutions to provide narrative reports every four years regarding their progress and success in six broad categories of institutional effectiveness. When these reports were first circulated, however, they were criticized for being too lengthy and long on narrative but short with data, and therefore not useful to the Legislature.

During this time, two institutions were embroiled in controversies over improprieties in their athletics programs. The extent to which these scandals increased the frustration and suspicion of the public and the legislation toward higher education in South Carolina cannot be quantified, but it is likely that these scandals were a factor in the creation of new legislation designed to hold the state's public higher education system more accountable. In 1992, the Legislature adapted the institutional effectiveness measures of Act 629 and developed a new law, Act 255, which called for a more streamlined, quantitative report of institutional effectiveness and gave the CHE the additional authority necessary to collect and coordinate the data from the colleges and universities.

Policy Formulation and Adoption

The passage of 255 is the second major development in the history of accountability in the state. Acts 629 and 255, taken together, increased the power of the CHE by giving it the authority to require institutional reporting and collect institutional data, as well as to establish the parameters for these reporting and collection efforts. Institutions became uneasy about the increased power of the CHE, and complained to the Legislature. In response, in 1995 the Legislature passed Act 157, which gave institutions representation on the CHE by adding three institutional representatives, and gave the Governor the power to appoint CHE members, effectively diluting the CHE's authority.

Act 157 also empanelled a "blue-ribbon" committee, composed of legislators and businesspeople, to identify the problems and obstacles to improving South Carolina higher education institutions. This group became the force behind the performance funding effort in South Carolina. Working for the most part in private and without media attention, this committee and its findings led directly to Act 359, which brought performance funding to South Carolina in 1996. It is also important to note that prior to the passage of Act 359, at least four task forces had considered the performance funding policies of other states (e.g., Tennessee), and recommended the adoption of a similar system in South Carolina. Each time, however, the presidents of public institutions torpedoed these recommendations.

The third and most recent assessment policy, Act 359, was adopted by the legislature in 1996. Act 359 requires that state appropriations for public higher education be based on institutions' success in meeting expectations for performance indicators. These performance indicators are included in the legislation. According to one member of the CHE, Act 359 was an "attitude adjustment" for public higher education, precipitated by the business community in response to a perceived tendency by institutions to resist change and reform.

Policy Implementation

The first of South Carolina's assessment laws, Act 629 is still in effect, although there has been some criticism that the narrative reports are too long and unwieldy for use by state legislators. Act 629 requires colleges and universities to provide quadrennial reports on six broad categories of institutional effectiveness: general education; majors and concentrations; academic advising; academic success of transfer students (from two-year to four-year institutions); student development; and library resources and services.

Act 629 focuses upon quality assurance. Its goals are to strengthen the quality of higher education and to produce a continuous cycle of improvement in public colleges and universities. Act 255 required colleges and universities to provide data on a set of indicators established by the legislature to the Governor and the Legislature. The purpose of reporting under Act 255, however, differed from Act 629 in that data gathered in compliance with Act 255 were used for comparative purposes with institutions both in South Carolina and with institutions in the member states of the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB). This comparative dimension gives the policy a property of accountability.

Act 255 requires that the CHE submit reports to the Governor and the Legislature each year, and further requires that these reports are more quantitative and less narrative than the quadrennial reports mandated by Act 629. Under the auspices of Act 255, the CHE collects data from colleges and universities related to the following indicators: program accreditation status; graduation rates; lower division courses taught by full-time faculty, part-time faculty, and graduate students; success of students in developmental courses; number of students participating in sponsored research; alumni survey data related to job placement; student enrollment by race and by level (undergraduate or graduate); source of undergraduate degrees for graduate students; undergraduate transfers; results of professional and licensing examinations; alumni satisfaction; and institutional mission and role. For at least one indicator, graduation rates, data are also examined from public institutions in the other states of SREB to facilitate regional and inter-state comparisons.

Act 359 is a performance funding law requiring that state appropriations to colleges and universities be distributed according to success on 37 indicators which are grouped into the following nine categories: mission; faculty quality; instructional quality; institutional cooperation and collaboration; administrative efficiency; entrance requirements; alumni achievements; user-friendliness; and research spending. The CHE wanted to establish different standards for the four different sectors of higher education: research; teaching; two-year campuses of the University of South Carolina; and technical colleges. The system of standards established "sector benchmarks" for each of the four identified sectors of public higher education in South Carolina and connected them to funding. Beyond these basic definitions and sector benchmarks, based on the 37 indicators legislated by Act 359, the colleges and universities were allowed to set their own standards, subject to the approval of the CHE. Each year, the CHE revisits the sector benchmarks and standards, and modifies them if necessary.

Once the standards were in place, the CHE began a three-year phase-in of the performance funding law. During 1997-98, 14 of the 37 indicators were employed as part of the state's appropriations process; during the 1998-99 fiscal year, 22 were used; and during the 1999-2000 year, all 37 indicators were used. The CHE staff evaluates each institution on each indicator, based on the established standards, assigning them a score between 1 and 3. (A score of 1.00 to 1.44 means the institution "substantially does not achieve" the required performance for the indicator, while a

score of 2.85 to 3.00 means the institution “substantially exceeds” the required performance for the indicator. Thus, each college or university receives a score between 1.00 and 3.00, representing the average of its scores on all 37 performance indicators.)

While in theory, 100% of each college and university’s state appropriation is determined by its performance score, in reality an institution’s funding depends on two factors. The first is the determination of need. This “need” has two components: the Mission Resource Requirement (MRR), which represents the level of funding necessary for an institution given its mission, size, and complexity of programs, based on regional and national norms, and the amount of the previous year’s appropriation.

The second factor is the performance score, and an institution receiving a higher performance score than another institution is entitled to a proportionally higher share of supplemental appropriations than a lower-scoring institution. In practice, all institutions have received total scores indicating that they are making satisfactory progress, or are meeting institutional benchmarks, on the performance indicators, which means they have received “rewards” ranging from 1 to 3% of their total annual appropriations, or determined need. For those institutions that receive low scores in certain areas, indicating that improvement is necessary, the CHE has set aside .25% of the annual higher education budget for competitive grants for assistance and remediation in those areas. It is important that Act 359 is in addition to, not in place of, Acts 629 and 255.

Regarding common instruments in use, besides professional licensure and certification examinations (such as NTE and NMBE), there is a statewide survey using a common set of survey questions, while others do vary by institution. Act 629 contains substantial consideration of teaching-learning elements. Two of the categories of performance indicators in Act 359 address issues of instructional quality and the achievements of graduates. And there is a comprehensive statewide database at the SHEEO level, containing student records from four-year and two-year public institutions. Act 629 and the SACS accreditation criteria reinforce one another.

Policy Evaluation

Performance funding in South Carolina has not met with anything approaching unanimous acceptance. The leaders of the colleges and universities have questioned the fairness of the system; the three major research universities in South Carolina—the University of South Carolina (USC), Clemson University, and the Medical University of South Carolina (MUSC)—bear less of the financial burden because they generate more revenue from other sources, such as research grants and contracts, contributions, and endowment income, and thus do not depend upon state funding to as large an extent as smaller institutions.

On the other hand, these research universities complain because they are not evaluated on, and thus do not receive additional funds for, activities related to graduate education and research. During 1999-2000, USC, Clemson, and MUSC all attempted to “move” within the state governance system, from the authority of the CHE to the Department of Commerce. Some have also questioned the burden the law places on institutions to gather, process, and report data, especially when many institutions lack sufficient resources. There have been further criticisms that some of the indicators are contradictory; in some cases, raising average test scores would mean denying admittance to disadvantaged and under-prepared students, yet both increasing test scores and increasing access are key ingredients in the performance funding system.

The legislation has meant substantial changes in the CHE; a new office of Performance Funding had to be created. The CHE generally views Act 359 as a “work in progress” that

continues to evolve and improve with time. The sheer quantity and complexity of the 37 indicators makes establishing common definitions that work for all institutions difficult and implementation is also a challenge. The law has resulted in an improvement in the quality and consistency of data collected from institutions, and because the data are now linked with appropriations, they are examined and considered more carefully.

Most observers agree that performance funding will continue in South Carolina, although perhaps in a modified form in the future. In June of 2001, the Legislative Audit Council (LAC), a study group comprised of four legislators and five public members, released its report to the General Assembly entitled, *A Review of the Higher Education Performance Funding Process*. The purpose of the study was to consider whether the CHE, by its implementation efforts, has satisfied the intent of Act 359.²⁷

The LAC report found that the CHE was compliant with Act 359 in that a performance system was developed and implemented, but there were several problems with both the system and its implementation that should be corrected. The LAC recommended the law requiring that higher education funding be based on performance should be changed. Their most striking finding was that in the years since 1999, in which funding was to be based entirely on performance, the actual amount affected by performance scores was only 3%. Furthermore, they found that, based on simulations, that were funding to be entirely based on performance scores, the amounts institutions received would fluctuate wildly—as much as 30 to 40 percent annually. The funding system also fails to change institutions because the appropriations process already in place when the CHE implemented performance funding allowed some institutions to receive more than their equivalent percentage of funding according to need. Thus, the institutions are not starting the performance funding process on a level playing field.²⁸

Their conclusion was that the current system does not provide a comprehensive assessment of institutional quality, primarily due to four factors. First, there have been annual changes and much volatility in the indicators, scoring system, and standards for performance, thus making it difficult to establish meaningful findings. Second, it has been difficult to adequately measure or quantify some of the indicators. Third, some indicators have a narrow focus that may not capture the performance of an institution in a broad activity like cooperation and collaboration with external organizations. Fourth, it may not always be appropriate to evaluate institutions within the same sector by similar indicators, as each institution has different missions and student populations.²⁹

The CHE responded to the LAC report by saying that all funding is indeed subject to performance, but that the amount of financial impact is limited to 3% because most institutions score in the achieves or exceeds categories. The amount of difference between these two is approximately 3% of an institution's funding. Therefore, the phrasing in the law should read, "based in part," rather than "based entirely" on performance. Also, the CHE has been constantly reviewing the indicator system and developing it in association with institutions and external stakeholders. The 2001-2002 system features fewer and more appropriate indicators, less reporting by institutions, a larger proportion of indicators unique to sectors and to institutions, all of which should result in a more accurate assessment of institutional performance.³⁰

²⁷ Legislative Audit Council (2001). *A review of the higher education performance funding process: A report to the General Assembly*. Columbia, SC.

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Ibid.

³⁰ Ibid.

Conclusions

In the case of South Carolina, the advent of performance funding can be viewed as the reaction, by state legislators and businesspeople, to a series of issues: (1) sustained concerns over institutional quality and effectiveness, exacerbated by the perceived inadequacy of earlier legislation (Acts 629 and 255) to address these concerns; (2) growing public uneasiness with higher education, resulting from high-profile scandals involving two of the most visible public institutions in the state (University of South Carolina and Clemson); (3) legislators' frustration with institutional behavior (complaints about the CHE's authority, calls for increased funding, and resistance to repeated task force recommendations regarding performance funding); and (4) a new political climate that demanded more accountability from public higher education.

It is likely that if the higher education community had been more involved and cooperative, the situation in South Carolina would look very different. Comments by legislators, business people, and commission members all suggest a widespread perception that colleges and universities resist change generally, and efforts to increase their accountability in particular. Because the performance funding law was developed almost entirely by legislators and business interests, there is less attention to student learning outcomes, or learning-based indicators; the focus in South Carolina is clearly on accountability for public money and institutional efficiency.

If higher education had "played ball" with business and government, the initial result might have been a more learning-centered piece of legislation, with more and better measures of student learning outcomes. This is not necessarily true, however; since there is also the perception among legislators and Commission members alike that too much focus on teaching and learning issues is micromanagement by state authorities. The implication of this perception seems to be that the state should concentrate on accountability and efficiency, while leaving teaching and learning to the institutions.

Although the initial interest in the quality of higher education came from the CHE, all three state policy initiatives came from laws enacted by the state legislature. The role of the CHE has been primarily to develop the regulations and standards by which institutions will be judged regarding effectiveness. The CHE is also charged with compiling reports on institutional performance and presenting them to the Governor and Legislature. The colleges and universities do have a voice in the process, as they were able to object to the increased power of the CHE, prompting the Legislature to weaken the powers of the CHE. Others having prominent roles in the development of policy have been business leaders in the state. They were instrumental in bringing about the performance funding initiative.

Performance funding in South Carolina is very much a "work in progress," most pointedly demonstrated by the findings of the LAC report and the declaration by the CHE that the manner in which it implements the system is constantly being fine-tuned. The CHE also touts the success of the system to external constituencies, pointing to positive changes in higher education as a whole; it is clear they believe in it as a force for positive change.³¹ The law likely will be modified in the near future, but for now, the state and the system of public higher education is committed to completing the journey begun in 1996.

³¹ South Carolina Commission on Higher Education (2002). How does performance funding work in South Carolina: Performance funding & accountability: A brief history and tutorial. Columbia, SC.

Washington

State Background and Overview

The Higher Education Coordinating Board (HECB), which also has regulatory, program approval, and budgetary review authority, replaced the Council for Postsecondary Education in 1985. It is comprised of gubernatorial appointees who are conformed by the senate and has many statutory responsibilities, including the preparation of master plans, developing mission statements, and recommending legislation or policy for institutions. Two-year institutions are served by the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges which was created by the Community College Act of 1967, later modified in 1991. This board is responsible for statewide policies and central administrative activity for all two-year institutions. The Washington Association of Independent Colleges and Universities serves as the voluntary organization for private colleges and universities, while the Workforce Training and Education Coordinating Board serves as the State Board of Vocational Education.³²

Table 7: Higher Education in Washington³³

	Public		Private			
	4 Year	2 Year	4 Year	4 Year	2 Year	2 Year
			<u>Non-Profit</u>	<u>For-Profit</u>	<u>Non-Profit</u>	<u>For-Profit</u>
Institutions	6	32	24	3	0	4
Enrollment	91,540	171,870	39,750		3,560	

There are six public four-year institutions in Washington (Table 7), and the two largest have five branch campuses between them. The state also has 27 community colleges and five technical schools as public, two-year institutions. Washington is also home to a large number of private institutions, with 24 of these being four-year colleges and universities, and a small but growing number of for-profit institutions competing in this market. More than 56% of Washington's students are enrolled in a public, two-year institution, and nearly 30% attend one of the four-year institutions. Regarding expenditures, for the current biennium, higher education received a 9.7% increase over its previous appropriation for a total of \$2.8 billion, which actually accounted for a slightly larger percentage of the state's budget than the year before.³⁴

Problem Formation

Washington, like many other states during the 1980s, began to reconsider how it defined quality in higher education. In an effort to encourage assessment and evaluation, the HECB conceived a Master Plan in 1988 "to develop a multi-dimensional program of performance evaluation" for each of its member colleges and universities. This plan "envisioned assessment as a link between two separate but complementary goals: to improve the quality of undergraduate education and to provide needed information about student outcomes to the HECB." The plan was

³² Education Commission of the States, 1997.

³³ The Chronicle of Higher Education, Almanac, 2001.

³⁴ Ibid., Education Commission of the States, 1997.

refined in 1989 by the HECB in a resolution directing each member four-year institution and community college to follow an evaluation program.

Historically, the movement for increased accountability in Washington stemmed from the conservative class of legislators who were elected as part of the national “Republican Revolution” in 1994. They took control of the State Legislature, and they adopted a “show-me” attitude in education funding and many other policy domains. The interest in holding state government more accountable for the public funds it received was part of a larger approach to governance taken by the incoming “class of 1994.” Over time, the focus in higher education accountability has shifted to a statewide goal that is locally measured, which allows for some institutional autonomy.

In terms of influence, institutional presidents were essential for setting the original parameters for the assessment initiative. Also, in the Board's 1989 resolution refining the performance evaluation program, the board agreed to appoint a subcommittee to work with staff and institutional representatives to continue development of the performance evaluation program.

Policy Formulation and Policy Adoption

The 1989 resolution stated the goals of this performance evaluation program differently than the 1988 master plan. According to the resolution, the evaluation program had two complementary goals: "(1) to provide a means for institutional self-evaluation and improvement, and (2) to meet the state's need for institutional accountability in order to assure quality in the state's higher education system." This language reflects the focus in Washington's assessment policy on accountability and quality assurance.

According to the HECB's 1988 Master Plan, “in the past, quality has been measured in terms of resources or inputs—the number of volumes in the library, the reputation of the faculty, the level of expenditures, and the characteristics of incoming students. While these measures are easily quantifiable and generally available, they do not capture what students actually learn during their undergraduate experience. Assessment, on the other hand, emphasizes measures indicative of student learning, or ‘student outcomes.’”

In response to the emerging need to measure outcomes rather than inputs, the Washington State Board for Community College Education (now the State Board for Community and Technical Colleges, or SBCTC) developed a Student Outcomes Plan. In the first policy cycle, the State Legislature provided funding only for system-level outcomes assessment under this plan, which focused on technical education, transfer education, and basic skills education. During the 1990-1992 biennium, the Legislature authorized additional funding for assessment at the institutional level at each of the state's 27 community colleges. In 1994, the assessment plan and funding were expanded to include the state's five technical colleges. Today, the SBCTC continues its system-level assessment activities, focusing on the dissemination of research results, identification of research and policy implications, and development of budget priorities.

During the 1997-1999 legislative biennium, the State Legislature directed the HECB to develop an accountability system in consultation with Washington's public four-year universities and college. The call was for an accountability plan, in the form of performance funding, for higher education. This accountability plan charged the HECB with measuring four-year institutions in the

following five areas: undergraduate graduation efficiency, undergraduate student retention, five-year graduation rates, faculty productivity, and institution-specific measures.³⁵

Policy Implementation

To move the accountability system directive into action, the Legislature tied resources to the completion of institutional plans during the first year of the biennium, and during the second year, to actual performance on the five measures outlined in the budget legislation. The HECB established “performance targets” for the six four-year institutions in these areas, with institutional performance measured from baseline data from the 1995-1996 academic year. For fiscal year 1998, a total of \$4.3 million of state funding was held in reserve by the Office of Financial Management for accountability purposes; in fiscal year 1999, the total for reserved funds was \$6.4 million. Each four-year institution had a different amount of funds placed in reserve, ranging from a high of \$2 million for the University of Washington to a low of \$144,000 for The Evergreen State College during FY 1998.

During the 1989-1991 biennium, the Legislature followed-up on the master plan by establishing a line-item in the budget of each public institution for assessment purposes. Presently, each four-year institution receives \$377,000 per biennium in this line-item, and a total of \$1.5 million is given to the SBCTC for distribution to the community and technical colleges. The HECB has protected institutional flexibility in devising a policy that allowed for assessment that was tailored for each institution’s mission and goals. However, each institution’s assessment plan must meet the broad, overarching state goals: institutional self-evaluation and improvement, and institutional accountability for quality.

State funding has always been a part of the assessment effort for two-year colleges. Initially, \$400,000 was appropriated to each four-year institution for outcomes assessment purposes. Now, \$56,000 is given to each campus for outcomes assessment, and the two-year institutions report to the SBCTC about how they spend the money. Among the expenses are conferences, retreats, and newsletters for faculty and administrators that focus on assessment. In all cases, the goals are to encourage professional development and to create an assessment literacy among faculty. Coordination and communication are both essential to these efforts.

Writing and quantitative skills and alumni and employer satisfaction are mandated outcomes. The manner in which these are measured is left to the discretion of the community college system and the individual four-year public institutions. The 1995 Assessment Report noted means by which institutions had been using assessment to understand and improve the teaching/learning process. Also, the state does not have common instruments. Upon recommendation of the 1988 Master Plan, "Building a System", the HECB piloted three nationally-normed tests (College Measures Program, Academic Profile, and Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency) and decided they were not adequate for assessing the quality of undergraduate education, in particular the targeted academic skills -- communication, computation and critical thinking. Following this pilot effort, individual institutions were encouraged to develop their own assessment tools and tests.

³⁵ Higher Education Coordinating Board (2000). Performance accountability: 1999-2000 academic year review and recommendations for 2001-03. Olympia, WA.

There were challenges to assessment at the campus level, however, because of unevenness across campuses in terms of the quality and quantity of assessment work being done. The prevailing wisdom was that the campuses know more than the central office about how best to assess performance, and therefore individual institutions needed to have more autonomy. This decentralized approach makes communicating the results from campus to campus more difficult.

Internal politics and logistics can also present problems for implementation. Turnover in the faculty ranks negatively affected the efforts to build a culture of assessment at the campus level. There was also tension between accreditation and assessment because of the duplication of effort in meeting the requirements of both entities, evidenced by the additional burdens placed on institutional research staff.

During the 1997-1999 biennium, the SBCTC was charged with measuring two-year institutions on the following outcomes: hourly wages for vocational graduates, transfer rate to four-year institutions, core course completion rates, and graduation efficiency.³⁶ In the following biennium, the Legislature authorized the SBCTC to modify its accountability plan to address the following priorities: close the skilled labor force gap, increase the number of transfer students, and improve the skills of basic skills students.

The following components are expected to be incorporated by each four-year and community college systems' performance evaluation programs:

- collection of entry-level baseline data;
- intermediate assessment of quantitative and writing skills, and other appropriate intermediate assessments as determined by the institution;
- end of program assessment; post-graduate assessment of the satisfaction of alumni and employers; and
- periodic program review.

Each of the two-year campuses in Washington has assessment liaisons with the SBCTC. The annual conference on assessment tends to be dominated by participants from two-year institutions. Since many campuses, especially two-year institutions, believed that the state funding would quickly evaporate, they tried to get the “biggest bang for the buck.” However, as state funding has stabilized, two-year campuses are trying to “flip the switch” in the minds of faculty, make a systematic change in institutional culture, and consider how the state money can be used to leverage longer-term reform.

One key to assessment success at the SBCTC has been the development of an extensive database and data infrastructure related to institutional assessment. This database and infrastructure allow institutions to share information among themselves, and as these data becomes web-based (as it has in 2001), sharing and collaboration can occur even more readily. Regarding reporting requirements, biennial assessment reports have been used to focus attention on "how students learn, how faculty/curricula/institutions help them learn, and what contributes to student learning." The

³⁶ Specifically, these outcomes were to increase the average wage of job preparatory students to \$12/hour; increase the successful transfer rate for students to 67%; increase the core course completion rate for students to 85%; and increase the efficiency rate of the student educational goal achievement.

state has documented specific examples of how assessment has already been, and can continue to be, an "aid to policy." Annual reports are expected from six public four-year institutions and SBCTC. The HECB publishes its own annual assessment report that is a compilation of findings from across the institutions, including an overall evaluation of the state of assessment. Finally, a statewide database exists but is not comprehensive.

Since its annual report for 1995, the HECB acknowledged that assessment policies could, and often do, have multiple functions. Washington has made clear its preference for the assessment as improvement rather than as accountability. Accountability and assessment are two different things, and they need to be treated as such. Accountability should occur at the system level and assessment should occur at the campus level. SBCTC's focus is student learning, not institutional accountability. Their belief is that when high stakes are placed on a performance funding/reporting policy, there is often a rash of unintended consequences. Performance funding policies are, at best, a proxy for the real issues or concerns about the state's college and universities, usually pertaining to quality. Because Washington is a very iconoclastic state, institutions have resisted assessment efforts, and most of the assessment policy has allowed for substantial institutional flexibility.

Policy Evaluation

The impetus for performance funding is entirely in the budget; there is no statutory language tied to the policy. Through the budget language, the Legislature wanted higher education, and in particular four-year institutions, to work harder, to graduate students in a more timely fashion, and to become more financially efficient. In the opinion of many legislators, two-year institutions were more agreeable to the initial push for accountability, and have been much more responsive to the needs of business, than four-year institutions.

From the beginning of accountability and assessment efforts at the state level, there was a distinction drawn between two- and four-year institutions. This distinction was due in large part to the difference in governance structures between these institutional types. There was also a political difference between two- and four-year institutions. Two-year institutions were more politically sophisticated, and more willing to get involved in the political process, than four-year institutions. To their own peril, four-year institutions were disdainful of politics at the state level. Two-year institutions moved more quickly to engage the Legislature on the assessment issue, and thus had much more success in getting their concerns addressed. Four-year institutions resisted the entire assessment movement, and this resistance made many legislators less inclined to address their concerns.

Business also had a significant role to play, as the business community felt institutions were not graduating a well-trained workforce. Business organizations, such as the Business Roundtable, were instrumental in pushing for accountability and assessment. Individual constituents were also effective in making increased institutional accountability a formidable political issue; voters felt that institutions needed to demonstrate results for the public money they received. Of course, there was resistance from four-year institutions, who could not figure out what benefits were in this accountability and assessment movement for them.

In terms of assessing the four-year institutions, the HECB became involved as a mediator between the institutions and the State Legislature because of a credibility gap. This credibility gap developed in the mid-1990s, when the Legislature relied on the Council of Presidents (a group

consisting of presidents of public four-year institutions) and experts at the University of Washington to articulate a list of appropriate measures for assessment and accountability purposes. The measures proposed by the Council of Presidents were, for the most part, levels that the institutions had already achieved; in other words, the proposed measures did not represent a “stretch” for most institutions. Legislators felt that they were being deceived by the Council, and the four-year institutions in general, and they responded by crafting legislation that was more punitive and focused on performance funding than it would have been otherwise. Since the 1997-1999 legislative biennium, the HECB has operated to mitigate the resistance of four-year institutions to assessment and accountability efforts, and to take a more proactive position on behalf of higher education. It seeks to prevent an extensive performance-funding mandate like that in South Carolina from being instituted in Washington.

For the 1999-2001 biennium, the HECB modified the program somewhat. The basic elements remained the same, but the manner in which performance targets were set changed. Rather than prescribing targets based on annual percentage increases that were the same for all institutions, the new guidelines gave this responsibility to institutions to set meaningful targets that would lead to "measurable and specific" improvement. The baseline was recalculated on a three-year average to be more representative of actual performance.³⁷

The HECB has also recommended that, for the current biennium, there is a legitimate state interest in assessing the efficiency of its institutions, and should therefore continue monitoring progress on its indicators. However, it does not favor establishing budgetary links with the indicators but instead feels that the current policy of having no monetary penalties attached to performance be continued. It also proposes continuing institution-specific measures, as well as providing support to institutions to implement strategies for student learning assessment initiatives through the state's Fund for Innovation.³⁸

Conclusions

The downside of the approach has been its “decentralized” nature. The institutional-centered approach results in substantial variation among institutions (some say that it reflect the uniqueness of the various institutions). A second downside is “sustaining energy” – particularly with administrative and faculty turnover which can have a dramatic effect on a fragile assessment effort. Third, the strategy has focused on building a culture of assessment. Building a new culture is a slow process, it takes a long time, it is sometimes messy, and difficult to communicate in a sound bite. It becomes impossible to succinctly communicate the impact of the assessment activities. Another complicating factor is that there does not appear to be a strong relationship between the Washington policymakers and the their regional accreditation association, the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges.

The HECB recognizes more so than just measuring efficiency in higher education, there is a state interest in moving towards an accountability system that contributes valuable information to institutions as well as policymakers and promotes the improvement of student learning processes by "focusing on measures that reflect challenges and improvements at the individual campus level."³⁹ It

³⁷ Higher Education Coordinating Board (2000).

³⁸ Ibid.

³⁹ Ibid.

seeks to help policymakers understand that the measures currently in use may lack validity because they don't reflect underlying institutional processes, that measures may work at cross-purposes, and that policymakers have other means by which to learn about the performance of institutions. Also, the measures currently in use are of limited to institutions because of their lack of precision, may be influenced by factors beyond an institution's control, and because of all these factors, any aggregated trends might not produce informative results. Finally, the HECB seeks to establish more continuity in the data that is used for evaluations. They desire to make policymakers understand that there is a significant disconnect between assessment used for accountability or to determine efficiency and that which is conducive to the improvement of classroom instruction and learning.

The HECB seeks to keep the assessment and accountability processes focused at the institutional rather than the state level, but also meet state goals by having institutions implement strategies that lead to improvement in performance and in student learning processes. Student learning occupies a prominent role in the 2000 HECB Master Plan for higher education, as well as its recommendations for the 2001-03 biennium. The Board wants to have an assessment system that makes sense for the institutions in its state while moving away from concise abstractions for targets. To accomplish this, the HECB will continue its work with institutional leaders, legislators and governor's staff, as well as the public to refine and modify the current accountability system so that it is reflective of state needs.

Missouri

State Background and Overview

The state of Missouri has a moderate degree of centralization in its assessment policy. It has a regulatory coordinating board with budget authority, assessment by a combination of statute and policy, and mixture of mandated and jointly developed indicators. At the state level, Missouri simultaneously employs performance-based funding and a performance-reporting mechanism for monitoring the quality and progress towards strategic goals. Performance-based budgeting is used in the Funding for Results program, while a performance reporting approach is used by the state to monitor progress on its "Statewide Public Policy Initiatives and Goals for Missouri Higher Education." Together, these policies are intended to compel colleges and universities to articulate distinctive missions, develop more productive and efficient means of accomplishing them, and to do so in the service of statewide goals for public higher education.

The Missouri Coordinating Board for Higher Education (CBHE), established in 1972 has statutory authority for recommending a unified budget to the Governor and the General Assembly, as well as master planning and data collection for the consideration of public policy initiatives for higher education. Missouri has a total of 113 postsecondary institutions, 31 of which are public (Table 8). Currently, the state has 13 public four-year institutions and 18 public two-year campuses. Missouri also has 59 independent two-year and four-year institutions and 23 proprietary schools. In 2001, there were more than 199,000 students enrolled at public colleges and universities, over 110,700 students at four-year independent colleges and universities, and over 7,400 at private career schools. The state allocated more than \$1 billion to institutions for operating expenses in 2000-01-- only a 2.2 % increase over the previous year-- and spent over \$35 million on student aid.

Table 8: Higher Education in Missouri⁴⁰

	Public		Private			
	4 Year	2 Year	4 Year	4 Year	2 Year	2 Year
			<u>Non-Profit</u>	<u>For-Profit</u>	<u>Non-Profit</u>	<u>For-Profit</u>
Institutions	13	18	54	6	5	17
Enrollment	120,500	78,820	110,710		7,450	

The Independent Colleges and Universities of Missouri serves as a state level organization for member private institutions, and the State Board of Education is the State Board of Vocational Education in the state. Also, the state is a member of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA) and its institutions generally support programs that reflect the standards promulgated by NCA.⁴¹

An amendment to the state constitution limits the rate at which state revenues can grow. For the past few years, this has forced the legislature to refund excess tax revenues. The state is also

⁴⁰ The Chronicle of Higher Education, Almanac (2001).

⁴¹ Education Commission of the States, 1997.

trying to exempt its tobacco revenues over the next 25 years from the constraints of this amendment so they may be used by university medical schools. These factors, combined with the economic slowdown nationwide, are adversely affecting the financing of higher education in the state.

Policy Formulation and Adoption

The original impetus for assessment in Missouri came not from the government but from a single institution that began experimenting with assessment on its own. Northeast Missouri State University (NEMSU), now Truman State University, had begun to develop assessment programs in the 1970s and by the mid-1980, had implemented a value-added assessment program. Based on its success and subsequent national attention, Governor John Ashcroft mandated assessment and challenged the state's institutions to demonstrate that their students were learning.

In 1987, Missouri conducted the Student Achievement Study (SAS) to track the performance of high school students through college graduation. At the time, however, the assessment process statewide was quite decentralized and analysis of reports showed that the practices varied among the state's colleges and universities. In the 1980s, the CBHE, together with other higher education groups, came together to develop a statement promoting assessment. Missouri involved business leaders in the policymaking process and made a decision to use data in the decision making process. In 1991, the directors of assessment at each institution formed the Missouri Assessment Consortium (MAC) to exchange ideas.

Also in 1991, the CBHE convened a statewide task force consisting of leaders from institutional governing boards and the State Board of Education. The report of the task force established new quality objectives for higher education and the 24 goals that emerged from these goals formed the basis for performance reporting and performance funding. The SAS system was expanded to include reports on performance indicators, thus forming the basis for what would later become the Funding for Results (FFR) program.

Policy Implementation

Assessment activity in Missouri primarily serves three inter-related purposes: 1) improving student learning and instruction, 2) accomplishing institutional missions, and 3) achieving accountability for achieving educational goals. The first two work together to demonstrate the achievement of the third purpose. Missouri has developed three levels of assessment to fulfill these objectives. First, there is the statewide initiative demanding certain levels of performance from institutions in key areas, commonly known as Funding for Results. Second, the state strategic plan for higher education calls for a mission review and enhancement process coordinated by CBHE. Third, there is the general monitoring of data on the public higher education system undertaken by the CBHE to gauge its overall performance. All of this activity is meant to stimulate the development of ongoing assessment programs at the institutions.

State-level assessment initiatives in Missouri.

Funding for results serves two purposes: first, the improvement of instruction and student learning and second, institutional effectiveness and accountability. The CBHE designed FFR to be a results-oriented performance funding strategy that integrates strategic planning with budget and assessment policies. Using a data based indicator system, a portion of each institution's annual budget increase is linked to its performance. Additional funds are generated for each public

institution's budget based on student and institutional performance. The budget allocation for meeting these goals goes into the school's general budget.

The program also operates on two tiers—state and campus. At the state level, institutions are rewarded for achieving statewide goals established by Missouri's planning initiatives. The second tier, which is voluntary and operates on the campus level, permits diversification by rewarding institutions for designing and implementing locally controlled performance funding programs emphasizing innovations in teaching and learning. All of Missouri's 29 public campuses have chosen to participate in this program. This local tier was born in 1994 when CBHE received a two-year FIPSE grant that allowed institutions and faculty to focus on the improving teaching and learning by using block grants to sponsor on-campus projects. The institutions designed their own projects and evaluated them by collecting their own data. This effort has made the goals and outcomes more mission sensitive.

Each year, the statewide priorities and goals that drive the FFR program are reviewed by the CBHE, governor, legislators, institutional governing board members, and college and university administrators and faculty. Although the funding elements have remained relatively stable, minor changes based on institutional recommendations have been incorporated each year. Existing funding elements have been refined to establish more meaningful results, and new elements have been added to increase the emphasis on quality and the alignment with the board's major public policy goals.

The current elements for FFR are: 1) assessment of graduates, 2) success of underrepresented groups, 3) freshman success rates, 4) performance of graduates, 5) transfers to four-year institutions, 6) quality of prospective teachers, 7) quality of new graduate students, 8) quality of new undergraduate students, 9) attainment of graduate goals, 10) certificate/degree productivity, 12) successful job placement, 13) degrees in critical disciplines, and 14) achieving institutional mission.

FFR was designed to never involve more than 5% of the state's general appropriations for higher education, and the CBHE's goal is for institutions to receive up to 1% of their planned expenditures for campus-based teaching and learning projects. Budget requests are designed so that each institution has a core budget that is carried forward. Consequently, the allocation associated with FFR is not "one-time" money. In this way, the total amount of money appropriated in any given year is relatively small, i.e., less than two percent of an institution's total budget.

Statewide goals and mission enhancement.

Mission differentiation is an especially important component of the assessment effort at the state level. The CBHE's most recent strategic plan --*Blueprint for the Future of Missouri Higher Education*--includes goals stating that all of Missouri's institutions should have differentiated missions designed to meet state needs, result in a minimum of program duplication, and demonstrate institutional performance and accountability through appropriate assessment efforts. Each institution identified an individual mission, and over time the focus of campuses changed toward the success of students. The legislature asked that institutions select a focus, produce a measure of quality outcomes, and then review their role, scope, and mission every five years.

The CBHE has been able to modify its vision for higher education while also incorporating the Governor's goals for higher education under the "Show Me Results" program, a government accountability initiative. The most recent strategic plan collects all of the goals for higher education under three broad values: access, quality, and efficiency. Within these three broad areas, the CBHE and the Department of Higher Education collect data on the achievement of the statewide initiatives and goals by all the public institutions of higher education.

Under the area of "access," the CBHE gathers information of the educational access and attainment of all Missourians. In terms of quality, the CBHE monitors four areas of information: student preparation, institutional environment, teacher preparation, and student performance. For efficiency, the CBHE engages in mission review and differentiation and examines how access and quality are achieved through technology-based delivery systems. In all, there remain 24 goals to which the state is committed in its public postsecondary system. Baseline data was collected in 1993 using the CBHE Survey of Missouri Higher Education Performance Indicators, the Enhanced Missouri Student Achievement Study (EMSAS), and other state and national surveys. Performance Progress on these goals is monitored in a report entitled "Statewide Public Policy Initiatives and Goals for Missouri Higher Education."

Other assessment activity.

Testing in Missouri is prominent, as the state requires that every student at both 2-year and 4-year colleges be assessed at the end of their sophomore year. Several instruments and methods are available and students are required to take one. The College BASE, a criterion-referenced achievement test of general education that was developed at the University of Missouri-Columbia, is used for two purposes: it serves as an admissions requirement for all students entering the professional phase of their teacher education program, and is also used as a campus-wide indicator of achievement in general education at some colleges and universities, including all UM branches. Also, two national exams commonly used are the Academic Profile Test and the Major Field Achievement Test, both of which were developed by the Educational Testing Service to assess general education.

In addition, faculty at Missouri's institutions have also made use of instruments as the GRE, the National Teacher's Examination, the Enhanced ACT battery for basic reading skills, and the TASK Science and Social Science tests, as well as assessment techniques such as capstone courses, portfolios, institution-based writing assessments, and placement exams. Having few mandated common instruments and methods leads to a lot of variation among institutions regarding general education, although some alignment between statewide goals and campus goals is emerging.

Institutional involvement in Missouri is an important aspect of state-institution relationship. The Missouri Assessment Consortium (MAC) is an informal and voluntary collaboration of institutional directors of assessment. One reason for forming this group was to establish a network of professionals of assessment and to facilitate bargaining between the states and institutions and to have more clout with testing companies to purchase assessment instruments at reduced rates. That precedent of sharing continues as the group meets regularly to share ideas and practices. It serves as a buffer between the institutions and the CBHE and retains its informality. It has no established leadership; the organization of the meetings is rotated among the members and the next organizer collects current issues from the membership and sets the agenda. In 1992, MAC issued its eight Principles for Assessment. This was meant to be a common statement of philosophy that would

help institutions develop their own programs and also present a united front for legislators and policymakers regarding assessment. MAC has since tried to shape policy on student assessment more towards institutional concerns.

A second group working with state officials on important issues has some influence on the acceptance, but does not advocate it the way the MAC does. The Missouri Association of Faculty Senates (MAFS) is considerably smaller in number and represented only the four-year public institutions. In particular, MAFS emphasizes the need to increase shared governance throughout the state. Our observation was that this group was not as enthusiastic, knowledgeable, or optimistic about assessment as the MAC.

The regional accreditation focus on assessment has had an important influence on institutions and set forth the expectation that colleges and universities should document that learning is taking place. There was a sense that the accrediting agencies provide greater and more long-term leadership on assessment and that the state should work with them more. Overall, the relationship with accreditation bodies is multifaceted. The disciplines have their own focus on competencies.

The Department of Higher Education & the Coordinating Board have the overarching goal of building consensus about a policy direction, and then to identify goals and outcomes to move Missouri in that direction. The CBHE works to ensure that the goals and strategic initiatives for public higher education are represented to the state legislature. The CBHE plays an important role in the legislative process because it forces debate over funding issues between institutions behind the scenes and helps to insulate higher education. This allows higher education to speak with one voice to the legislature. The CBHE works closely with the institutions in implementing assessment efforts as it monitors progress towards state goals, but it does not see changing institutional processes as its role.

The Legislature and Coordinating Board have enjoyed a good working relationship during this process. Currently, there is so much of a need for improvement in K-12 education that there has been little focus on higher education. The legislative perspective is one of satisfaction with the work of the coordinating board and a belief that FFR had met the intent of the legislature. The concern now was to trim back the FFR program due to institutional complaints that there are too many state requirements related to assessment. The bottom line for legislators is that FFR is working and improving performance, although institutions might resist.

There are also two large issues looming over the immediate future of both FFR and the other assessment practices. The first is the Hancock Amendment—where any surpluses over 4% in the state treasury get refunded to the taxpayers. This combined with tax cuts is expected to lead to serious budget problems. The second and potentially more problematic issue is term limits-- a major issue in Missouri with almost half of the legislature term limited in the next cycle. The major concern with term limits on the legislative process is that they create a lack of historical perspective and deep understanding on complex issues.

Policy Evaluation

The CBHE believes that FFR has changed institutional behavior, and convinced them to refocus and sharpen their missions. This has resulted in greater differentiation among Missouri's numerous public institutions, which increases both accountability and efficiency. FFR is serving as a catalyst for change by encouraging the involvement of stakeholders across the system.

Higher education officials in Missouri felt they had been successful with assessment because it was accomplished without a state mandate. The legislature did not deal specifically with assessment, but their priorities were affordability, job placement, and retention and graduation, as well as dissatisfaction with the way some institutions met their mission. The focus on mission and performance was addressed and carried out locally. Other strengths included flexibility, the ability to innovate, and the system's openness to experimentation, networking and sharing. Also the Coordinating Board has been successful in its efforts, including assessment, in keeping the funding steady and the legislature satisfied.

At this time, it seems the use of data is becoming more common, although the extent to which it is used for improvement varies. Officials stated that more could be done at the state level to close the loop of gathering and reporting information to have assessment make a difference. One theory is that FFR has been integrated into the management and administration, but not at the level of deans and faculty. Another explanation for the disconnect was that, perhaps, the state overreached in designing the policy. The feeling is that the legislature was trying to accommodate everyone with this system, and that more dollars tied to fewer indicators would produce a greater effect.

Institutional and CBHE representatives indicated a desire of faculty and departments to develop an accountability system that accounts for differences among institutional missions (e.g., admission selectivity) in interpreting scores/results. There are also concerns over finding appropriate strategies to validate local assessments that institutions already use to measure learning, rather than relying exclusively on nationally standardized tests. The general issue here for members of the MAC was with involvement in the system and communication within it. There have been some genuine opportunities for sharing information but some faculty and administrators feel the channels of communication have not always been open.

Other factors contributing to Missouri's longevity in engaging assessment include the importance of a sustained commitment of leadership from the SHEEO. The managers of the FFR system continue making improvements in the process, examining how its components focus on different clientele, and consider the mission and purpose of institutions. Open lines of communication between the board and the institutions, basing decisions on well-informed analysis of data, and moving towards simpler and more effective system- rather than focusing on complexity- have contributed towards perpetuating this program.

Going forward, the CBHE's long-term plan is to institutionalize FFR and make assessment and accountability part of each institution's culture. There is the potential for complications if FFR is used in a competitive or punitive way; institutions should only be measured against themselves. The CBHE's intent is to have the focus of the accountability policy not simply be on outcomes, which would not lead to improvements, but on assessment processes that contribute to teaching and

learning. That way, faculty and institutions would buy into the change and accept the use of assessment.

Also, the Governor has made a commitment to FFR and would like to see it continue. Legislators are also supportive of the program, although they express some concerns regarding mission enhancement and duplication, as in whether institutions are focusing on what they do best and accomplishing that which they intend. In this regard, the legislature is satisfied with some institutions and dissatisfied with others.

From a financial perspective, given the current economic slowdown, it appears that state finances will have a tremendous impact on the success of the program. The FFR program was born in an environment of abundant revenues, but the current environment is one of scarcity. Under such constraints, support for FFR may drop among institutions. The state will increase its scrutiny of higher education in difficult budget times. In fact, FFR may be cut or even eliminated as budgetary shortfalls materialize in the very near term. A revamped FFR program may be the only way to secure new dollars for higher education in Missouri. State officials emphasized that the clear message should be that results would continue to be expected. Special funding may be available or may simply be short-term, but when funding ends, the expectations for outcomes/results will still be there.

Conclusions

Missouri is probably one of two to three leaders in communicating and defining its goals for assessment and accountability – in large measure because the goals are tied to funding and because of the involvement of faculty in an advisory role and the campus tier of FFR. Missouri is a leader because of the multiple involvement levels – faculty, administrators, board, political leaders in the legislature and the Governor’s staff, and because of its success in garnering resources to support its results agenda.

The primary reason for Missouri’s success is twofold – 1) its tremendous success in garnering resources which in turn gets the attention of leadership at the campus level and 2) getting the attention of the faculty which in the long-term holds potential to affect what happens in the classroom. The commissioner felt strongly that the strength of the assessment/funding effort was the *process* involved: the discussions among the governor’s staff, the CBHE, legislators, and institutional representatives. At the same time, FFR provides a forum for key policy makers to send a strong signal about educational priorities without the heavy hand of a legislative mandate. Also, assessment has changed the conversation in the state; the Board sees that FFR is working itself into institutional culture.

As a matter of public policy, Missouri’s efforts with instituting a performance system among its public institutions would have to be considered a success. This statewide policy for assessment has moved the institutions closer to the state's intended goals for institutions, and in a manner that has allowed institutions to participate and raise important issues along the way. Institutions have become more focused on their missions and how they fulfill them, and the state government has some level of reassurance that the institutions are providing improved service to the state and its students.

Important factors contributing to this success were: 1) Missouri's culture that promotes institutional autonomy and the mixed governance system 2) Truman's early efforts and success with assessment/quality, and 3) the Governor's strong role combined with individuals who were elected to the legislature who had an agenda focused on results. Also, the CBHE provided strong leadership on behalf of the institutions, but also managed, over time, to incorporate the wishes of the state for results and performance into the ongoing administration and academic management of the institutions. The sustained commitment of those at the institutional level who participated in selling assessment and accountability on their campuses were instrumental in guiding this program toward positive outcomes. Finally, the sharing and ongoing communication that occurred between the important players is crucial to the process of formulating, implementing, and adjusting the policies to ensure they meet stakeholder needs.

Finally, any contradictions between the intended objectives of the accountability policy and its results occur because of the various ways that institutions have chosen to respond to the results agenda, with some fully embracing it and others doing so more superficially. However, these results are not unexpected given the strong campus autonomy that exists and is valued in Missouri. The most important barrier or factor regarding success concerning the Missouri policy agenda is campus leadership. The big question is whether having institutions meet FFR program goals really fosters the changes that were intended by the policy.

Florida

State Background and Overview

The philosophy of state policymakers in Florida regarding education policy is holistic, centralized, and focused on uniting all levels of public education. The state's approach to education encompasses the entire system from kindergarten through doctoral programs. In keeping with this philosophy, Florida is moving towards a seamless K-20 system, integrating all delivery systems under one Board of Education and making all systems subject to consistent education policies. The change was a legislative initiative to centralize decision making over large-scale institutional initiatives, rather than having individual institutional boards take actions that could result in duplication of programs or facilities. The state is currently in a transition phase that is expected to last until July of 2003, when the new Florida Board of Education will assume its duties controlling all educational levels.

The state of Florida has 145 institutions of higher education (Table 9). There are 11 public four-year universities and 28 public two-year institutions. The state has a large private sector, with 50 of these institutions being non-profit, while there is a total of 56 proprietary schools in the state. Enrollment at public four-year schools was over 229,700 in 2001, while public community colleges enrolled more than 311,000 students. Private four-year institutions had more than half the enrollment of their public counterparts, at over 128,700, and private two-year institutions enrolled just over 15,000 students in the past year.

Table 9: Higher Education in Florida⁴²

	Public		Private			
	4 Year	2 Year	4 Year	4 Year	2 Year	2 Year
			<u>Non-Profit</u>	<u>For-Profit</u>	<u>Non-Profit</u>	<u>For-Profit</u>
Institutions	11	28	45	22	5	34
Enrollment	299,750	311,210	128,770		15,010	

In higher education, the state has been moving towards performance-based accountability for all institutions, with assessment on institutional performance as well as student outcomes being gradually weaved into the criteria for budgeting. However, despite a long history of involvement in assessment activity, the state has not had formal and consistent policies and guidelines for institutions. Rather, the policy environment has produced a mixture of overlapping accountability statutes, data collection processes, and funding initiatives. Policymakers are, however, hopeful that the transition to a new governance structure will be the first step towards a more integrated assessment policy.

Problem Formation

The genesis of assessment in Florida is the State University System's (SUS) interest of 1975 in program review. The legislature was intrigued by the success of the program review and saw

⁴² The Chronicle of Higher Education, Almanac, (2001).

quality higher education as a way to increase the state's image and competitiveness. The Accountability Act of 1976 required gathering statewide data, including learning outcomes. This was a qualitative review that relied on quantitative data. Quality also included requiring faculty to document how much time they spent in the classroom. Also in 1982, the state initiated the requirement that students take the CLAST (College-Level Academic Skills Test). The test was meant to ensure that students entering upper-division work or graduating with an Associates degree were adequately prepared to succeed.

Policy Formulation and Adoption

Beginning with the 1982 *Master Plan*, a series of planning documents and reports on undergraduate education repeated the need for quality, defined as institutional performance and effectiveness. Also, the 1988 *Master Plan Update* recommended a review of the general education curriculum and for state universities to develop more integrated assessment programs. In 1989, a study of two-year colleges assessed how well they prepared students for CLAST. Assessment of the curriculum became a mandated activity with the General Appropriations Act, in which the state legislature charged the Postsecondary Education Planning Commission (PEPC) to undertake an assessment of general education curriculum at all institutions.

In 1991, the legislature tried to merge the concepts of accountability and budgeting by establishing an accountability reporting process that required institutions to make annual reports to the Legislature and the Governor regarding the achievement of outcome measures. The PEPC found in a 1992 report, that, although some institutions were engaged in assessment activities, not enough were systematic and comprehensive about it to satisfy policymakers. The Government Performance and Accountability Act of 1994 established performance-based program budgeting in Florida. The 1995 PEPC report, *Postsecondary Accountability Review*, recommended aligning accountability measures with those required by Performance-Based Program Budgeting (PBPB) and the incentive funding programs and that statutes require reporting on a set of issues rather than specifying a set of measures. State priorities were identified as access/diversity, quality, and productivity. In the 1998 Master Plan, the goal was to achieve efficiency and productivity and to change behavior at the institutional and student level. And in 2001, S.B. 1162 charged each sector of higher education to develop plans to make 10% of their funding contingent on system performance.

Policy Implementation

The primary purpose for accountability, as per the legislature, is improvement at the institutional level, while a second, significant goal is to provide information to state policymakers. This would make the assessment effort one of quality assurance and accountability. As discussed above, assessment in Florida has been a policy of accretion, with many laws and initiatives put into practice over the years to produce a policy that lacks the coherence of a singular, overarching policy towards assessment. The emphasis seems to have been on data collection and reporting by the institutions to various stakeholders who monitor important indicators for budgetary decisions.

Assessment is not focused on higher education broadly in the state. The pattern has been to work upwards through K-12 and onto entry and success in college. In general, policies and practices in the state have focused on the rigors of student preparation in high school, the readiness of students to do college level work, and the basic skills acquired through general education. Much of the assessment that is done also focuses on the institutions themselves and their performance.

There has been a long history of focusing on goals for efficiency and productivity; these seem to be the definition of institutional quality in the eyes of many policymakers.

This leadership of assessment is currently in transition as the governance system for education in Florida is undergoing a complete overhaul as part of the move toward an integrated system. The new K-20 Florida Board of Education provides leadership, and the state legislature sets the goals for institutions, including accountability. At this time, the roles of the Divisions of Colleges and Universities and Community Colleges is uncertain, although they expect to continue in some fashion as they remain the voice for institutions to the legislature and the Governor.

Florida has few formal, statewide policies in place, but there are three main practices that are ongoing. For higher education, this includes a testing program for students to determine readiness, placement, & basic competencies, a regular and systematic program review process, and a growing data reporting and collection effort.

Student testing.

Testing history goes back to the early 1980s. Postsecondary testing is part of a statewide testing program of the DOE. The state's policy seeks to ensure that students possess a minimum level of competency before moving onto a higher level of education. This explains why students are tested prior to graduation from high school and before moving onto upper division undergraduate education. In addition to the instruments listed here, institutions also make extensive use of professional licensure exams as evidence of success.

The College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) was initiated by the state in 1982, as a measure of communication and computation skills for rising college juniors to determine entry into the upper division or for the completion of an associate's degree. The CLAST tests 10th grade level content, and students who don't pass it have to either retake it or take a certain number of designated courses at a 2.5 GPA. Legislation allows for waivers with performance levels on courses or alternative tests. Alternatives to the tests (waivers) were developed because the research universities felt it was wasteful for their students to take it due to their selectivity. Not many students at universities take it now although there is still a large need for it at the CCS. CLAST is also used for finishing teacher candidates, although some were flunking, so alternatives were developed for them. This policy has been changed so now teacher candidates must pass it prior to entering their program. Graduating teacher candidates must now also pass the Florida Teacher Certification Examination (FTCE), which is the only test administered for any students beyond CLAST in the entire state.

The Florida College Entry Level Placement Test or "College Placement Test" (CPT) is required for admissions and placement at two-year and four-year institutions. Four-year institutions require minimum scores on SAT/ACT, while CCS students can present their scores or take the CPT. Two-year college students are tested for placement in English and math CPT. This remedial component must be passed before students are allowed to enter college level work. If students don't make the cut, they must go to remedial program and can't leave that program until they pass the Basic Skills Exit test, a local exam developed by Florida educators. Institutions have flexibility to set cutoffs on the course and exit test. The Florida Board sets competencies and skills, but institutions assemble a test from a state item bank that they then administer and score.

The Bright Futures Test is a testing program whose goal is to have students accelerate their degree progress. Students who enter with a GPA 3.0 or greater and at least a 970 SAT score receive a Bright Futures Scholarship, which pays 75% to 100% of their in-state tuition. As recipients,

students must take 5 College Level Examination Placement (CLEP) exams to test out of courses unless they've already gotten some college credit through AP or dual-enrollment. During this first year, participation has been voluntary but it will be required for all recipients starting next year.

The Florida Comprehensive Test (FCAT) is a minimum-competency testing program. Between 1990-96, changes in law produced a plan to administer FCAT as a way of obtaining improvement measures for children, so now there will be testing in grades 3-10. At Grade 10, FCAT replaces the old High School Competency Test (HSCT), but since it only tests 10th grade level skills, it is not testing the skills students will need in college.

Program review.

For many years, program review was a primary method for assessment, and performance was tied to budget requests. Originally, reports were made to the Board but these declined as it took on additional duties. Currently, public colleges and universities are required by law to review each major program every five years. Community colleges collect data annually, while vocational programs have different schedules for review. All programs in a discipline at all institutions across the state are reviewed at one time and then summarized into one report providing an overview of the discipline nationally and in the state, with individual reports on the programs in each institution.

Based on measures from legislature, there were many conversations about the level of scrutiny the state wanted to maintain. The legislature wanted program review to be a vehicle to examine productivity and quality measures at the program level, but this ran counter to the philosophy of Board staff. They sought to provide university administrators with management tools, which would only be monitored at the state level. Rather than having legislators set standards for programs, the Board felt there needed to be a stair-step system where the policies and the standards for a level are not set at a level too far away from the functioning unit of interest.

As part of shift to embrace student-learning outcomes within program review, the Board established an extra requirement. One year before review, institutions must submit a conceptual framework, and the goals and objectives of using learning outcomes measures for a program goal. The Board wants institutions to develop processes that aren't just presenting numbers but that also provide real information that serves the institutional goals.

Data reporting and collection.

There are various statutes and rules that require all postsecondary institutions and the Board to collect and report information about their students. These include students' levels of preparation, admissions and denials, number of under-prepared students, student progress through the system, and performance in required coursework. There are several practices currently in place.

The Readiness for College Report is a report to policymakers on how high school graduates perform on the CPT. The K-16 Office reports passage rates for reading, writing and math for each high school, and what institutions they attended. However, there are some problems with the test. It doesn't lend itself to comparisons and averages--it just states whether students were ready or not--and there is no state-level process to follow through on subsequent performance, although some

institutions do collect other follow-up data and issue their own reports. However, institutions don't always have the incentive to report the data because they don't benefit—only the high schools do.

The K-20 Data Warehouse is a first-in-the-nation education database. This database will be a comprehensive collection of information on all students in the state, for all levels of education they attend. The level of data will be massive, with information on student demographics, academic information, and financial aid, for starters. The system will also track a student's high school class, their college destinations after graduation, any need for remediation, and later performance. Institutions are also examined, including the performance of instructors based on how well students subsequently perform. It will allow for an analysis of students across systems, including articulation between schools and a student's progression. Presently, some of this data being warehoused is publicly available; some is summarized by the Board, and some remains unavailable.

Incorporated into this is another program called the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP), which tracks graduates into employment and also gauges employer satisfaction with their work and academic preparation. It is student-centered, with an emphasis on employment outcomes, positions, and salary. This will also facilitate an analysis of the supply and demand between the number of graduates in a field and placement.

The statewide course numbering system in Florida is a common course numbering system that facilitates transfers and degree completion. This is a descriptive system that IDs courses within both systems that have the same content and should therefore have the same number. The work is done on a 5-year cycle and directed by the Office of K-16 Articulation. This also allows for tracking of how many students take entry level or remedial courses statewide.

Policy Evaluation

The Governor's Office is still primarily focused on K-12 and the data warehouse and carries that model into its discussions about how to enact higher education accountability. Institutions and higher education agency staff feel they are unrealistic in their outlook. The CEPRI (formerly PEPC) performs a great deal of analysis on the proposals of the legislature and the impact of the budgeting systems. The legislature has been more interested in the accountability side rather than assessment because it wants data to inform budget decisions. Its stance is that institutions cannot be trusted to conduct assessment because they are not objective, although they do defer to the Secretary of the Board, Jim Horne, on higher education policy because there of a trust and respect there that comes from Horne's former tenure as a state senator.

The implementation of CLAST has not been without problems. Institutions in the different sectors of higher education wanted scores to reflect their selectivity so graduated levels for passage were established. Passage scores also fluctuated because of the disparate impact on minority groups so cutoff scores were eventually lowered. Not many students at universities take it, but there is still a need for it in the CCS. All in all, the number of students taking it has dropped from about 44,000 students to about 12,000. Testing officials feel that the test is still useful because those being tested are the right students to test, but acknowledge that they will have difficulty developing new items since the student pool is the lowest percentile of students.

Officials are also cognizant of student motivations that counteract the effectiveness of some measures. For example, passage of Bright Futures tests would lessen time to degree completion but

there are concerns that students don't want to lose the tuition money from their scholarship, since it covers four years of schooling. Also, because the exam has no penalty attached to failure, students may not perform their best, thereby lowering the effectiveness of the program. Thus, the state doesn't really know whether students have learned the knowledge or not. As such, it does not have data on passage but could start obtaining it once every recipient takes the tests. Currently, institutions report the data to the legislature, although they feel this is burdensome and have no incentive to do so. Also, the testing personnel we interviewed felt that there is currently a huge disjuncture between the graduation standards for high school and the entry-level criteria for college freshmen because FCAT scores cannot predict the scores for those taking the CPT. They feel this is a hole in the seamless education system.

Institutions are also concerned about possible unintended consequences from these policies, a phenomenon they referred to as "negative improvement." This means meeting targets by diminishing performance in some other, equally valid, goal that is not counted in the performance system but is affected by it. From their perspective, there is a disconnect between the political requirements for the accountability systems and the requirements that would be useful in managing the institutions. They need performance standards that are reasonable and not absolute targets, and a more consistent system is imperative so that data collection and reporting requirements are not changed from year to year.

Conclusions

In the state, there are essentially three levels of accountability at which assessment information is used. At the institutional level, the type of information gathered is primarily concerned with efficiency and productivity measures of output and throughput. It is at this level that the accountability plans for incentive and performance funding are most in use because the institutional data is what is monitored for the budgetary decisions. Florida also used enhancement funding to improve performance, including categorical funding, incentive funding, and competitive funding programs.

At the program level, the primary tool for quality assurance is the program review process. As discussed earlier, the Board is trying to convince the legislature to allow the standards for measurement to be set at the division or institutional level, rather than be prescribed by the legislature. The Board is also experimenting with a procedure called Educational Audits in which institutions must provide a certification of student learning. For students, the state makes use of licensure exams for the professional programs to evidence competency, although such information is aggregated to judge institutions. Also, there is the extensive testing program that was discussed earlier to assess readiness, placement, and basic competencies.

Although a large volume of data are reported and collected, it is unclear how much of it is used for institutional improvement. In keeping with the many practices, institutions feel as though there are four disparate processes in place, and they struggle to keep up with them. Institutions see themselves as focusing on assessment practices while the state is more concerned with accountability, defined as institutional performance. Meanwhile, program review is the process that facilitates improvement in academic departments and curriculum, whereas program evaluation of quality is done through accreditation. In this capacity, there is a strong influence of the SACS criteria and their processes. Some institutions regularly examine institutional effectiveness as part of their management philosophy, but they don't feel the state policy affects that.

It should be noted that many of the features and effects of assessment activity in the state are still to be determined because of the transitional nature of the governance structure and the continuing development of the accountability structure. Thus, it is too early to see what accountability will look like. Currently, there is no talk of increasing the testing system, but since the legislature doesn't trust the peer review model for accountability, the state is struggling to produce objective and fair measures of student outcomes.

The K-20 Board would like to support local control over these issues, but they feel the assessment process should be more like accreditation in that institutions are held accountable for their own outcomes. And they recognize that much of what is in place as accountability now is efficiency measures for institutions and not outcomes of learning. Those who favor more accountability but seek to have it useful to institutions recognize that the process has to grow. The first step could be a standard test for general education, followed later by others for graduates and advanced degrees.

Going forward, the Florida Board is seeking to implement the Legislature's four broad goals and seven strategic imperatives for education. The Accountability Task Force is a new arm of the Secretary of the BOE which works in accountability, research, and measurement and is studying the legislatively mandated process for K-20 education.

Regional Accreditation Associations

Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges

Established in 1887, the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges (MSACS) is the federally-recognized regional accrediting association for 489 institutions in five states (Delaware, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, and Pennsylvania), the District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, the Virgin Islands, and three overseas schools operated by American institutions. The Commission on Higher Education, one of three commissions under the Middle States Association umbrella, is responsible for the regional accreditation of postsecondary education institutions. In the case of Middle States, there is a tradition of emphasis on institutional assessment for accreditation purposes, and thus MSACS policy and philosophy can be developed in detail.

History

The MSACS was working on outcomes assessment as early as 1985, when it adopted its first standards. In 1989, it formed its first Task Force on Outcomes Assessment to develop its *Framework for Outcomes Assessment*, which was delivered to institutions in the fall of 1990 as a guide to help them design, initiate, and conduct effective outcomes assessment programs. In 1994, a second task force was formed, resulting in the revision of the *Framework* in 1996. In 1995, the association surveyed 495 member institutions regarding assessment activity and published the findings in 1996. In the same year, MSACS produced its first Policy Statement on Outcomes Assessment. Over the course of the next year, symposia were offered for institutions throughout the region on student assessment; the success of these programs led to more over the ensuing years. MSACS is currently in the process of a multi-year project to revise its *Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Eligibility Requirements and Standards for Accreditation* to be used for institutional self-study beginning in 2002. These standards will place greater emphasis on student learning outcomes and the diversity of delivery systems in higher education.

Criteria and Approach

MSACS has established fourteen standards for accreditation. Under the broad heading of “institutional context,” there are seven standards: mission, goals, and objectives; planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal; institutional resources; leadership and governance; administration; integrity; and institutional assessment. Under the heading of “educational effectiveness,” there are also seven standards: student admissions; student support services; faculty; educational offerings; general education; related educational activities; and assessment of student learning.

Most significant in these standards is the double-reference to assessment. In the first instance, “institutional assessment” calls for member institutions to demonstrate that they have “developed and implemented an assessment plan and process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in: achieving its mission and goals; implementing planning, resource allocation, and institutional renewal processes; using institutional resources efficiently; providing leadership and governance; providing administrative structures and services; demonstrating institutional integrity; and assuring that institutional processes and resources support appropriate learning and other outcomes for its student and graduates.”

This definition of assessment strongly suggests the value that assessment can and should play in institutional analysis and planning, with a focus on administrative process rather than student learning. In the second instance, “assessment of student learning” means “assessment of student learning demonstrates that the institution's students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals.” This definition of assessment is, clearly, student-centered. The dichotomy reflects a distinction between the institution as an entity in its own right, and the institution as the aggregation of students, who are the units of measure for assessment.

Methods and Processes

MSACS, like the other regional accrediting associations, allowed member institutions to use multiple measures of student outcomes; with Middle States, these measures included cognitive abilities, and information literacy, integration, and application. MSACS also called for institutions to use both qualitative and quantitative processes to measure student outcomes.

In its operationalization of institutional effectiveness, MSACS maintains that “the deciding factor in assessing institutional effectiveness is evidence of the extent to which it achieves its goals and objectives.” Outcomes assessment, on the other hand, “involves gathering and evaluating both quantitative and qualitative data which demonstrate congruence between the institution’s mission, goals, and objectives, and the actual outcomes of its educational programs and activities. *The ultimate goal of outcomes assessment is the improvement of teaching and learning* (emphasis added).”⁴³ MSACS gives member institutions substantial latitude in constructing an assessment program, but does provide some guidance about what an assessment program might contain. “The assessment plan...begins with a thorough review of the institution’s programs, curricula, courses, and other instructional activities.”

The assessments should include frequent appraisals of the academic progress and goal achievement of students, of the progress of graduates, and of alumni opinions.”⁴⁴ To meet MSACS requirements, an institution’s assessment plan should meet the following criteria: a foundation in the institution’s mission, goals, and objectives; the support and collaboration of faculty and administration; a systematic and thorough use of qualitative and quantitative measures; assessment and evaluative approaches that lead to improvement; realistic goals and a timetable, supported by an appropriate investment; and an evaluation of the assessment program.⁴⁵

In deciding what to measure, three areas of focus were identified: general education, other academic programs, and individual course offerings. Within these three areas cognitive abilities, information literacy, student integration and application by students of their knowledge and skills acquired via program offerings are highlighted. Means of possible measurement include proxy measures. Direct assessment of student learning, a value-added approach using portfolios as an approach is also mentioned. Quantitative and qualitative approaches are suggested, as well as the use of both local and standardized instruments. Methods of assessment that complement cognitive tests and provide indicators of instructional program quality are also listed.

⁴³ Characteristics of Excellence in Higher Education: Standards for Accreditation. Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges, 1994.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Outcomes Assessment Plans: Guidelines for Developing Assessment Plans at Colleges and Universities, The Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges, 1998.

Teaching is clearly a part of the assessment/improvement loop. It seems to be a tool to respond to student learning. Teaching itself is clearly not an object of assessment. The *Framework* includes a diagram linking learning, teaching, assessment and institutional improvement. The section on Assessment for Improvement discusses applying assessment findings to improve student learning in the classroom and throughout the curriculum as a whole.

Institutional Support

The *Framework* identifies as the ultimate goal of outcomes assessment the examination and enhancement of institutional effectiveness. Assessment is ideally seen as a partnership among faculty, administrators, and students. In terms of responsibility for assessment at the member institutions, the association indicated an expectation that administrators, faculty, and students would be part of the campus assessment process. The Commission does not and will not prescribe methodologies or specific approaches, but there is a clear expectation that the assessment of student learning outcomes is an ongoing institutional process.

As an indication of its commitment to the use of assessment in the regional accrediting process and to assist member institutions in implementing an outcomes assessment system that met association requirements, MSACS developed a “Framework for Outcomes Assessment.” The current framework is the product of two task forces, established by MSACS in 1990 and 1995.⁴⁶ This framework has formed the basis of the relationship between MSACS and its member institutions on the matter of assessment since 1994.

The “Framework for Outcomes Assessment” begins with an explanation of the purpose of assessment: “The fundamental purpose of assessment is to examine and enhance an institution’s effectiveness, not only in terms of teaching and learning, which rest at the heart of the mission at colleges and universities, but also the effectiveness of the institution as a whole.”⁴⁷ Assessing effectiveness became particularly critical in the 1990s, the MSACS framework points out, because of the changing national climate that demanded increased accountability from higher education. “One response to these new accountability regulations and policies has been to debate the purposes of higher education and to focus greater attention on measures of effectiveness. There is growing interest in obtaining answers to traditional questions such as: What should students learn? and How well are they learning it?”⁴⁸

In its framework, MSACS identifies three primary uses of assessment at the institutional level: improvement, institutional effectiveness, and accountability. Regarding improvement, MSACS sees assessment as an integral part of a feedback loop that begins with teaching, continues to learning, followed by assessment, and completes the loop at improvement of teaching. MSACS does not, however, mandate a standard set of outcomes for an institution, or standardization across institutions. Under the MSACS framework, campuses retain the flexibility to determine their own strategies for using assessment for improvement. In terms of institutional effectiveness, the

⁴⁶ Michael T. Nettles served on the 1995 task force. Another member of 1995 task force, Gerald Patton, left MSACS in 1997 to become Deputy Commissioner of Higher Education for New York. As referenced in the Project 5.1 case study of New York, Dr. Patton has been responsible for building a strong connection between Middle States’ assessment policies and New York’s assessment practices. Dr. Patton left the Deputy Commissioner’s position in January 2002.

⁴⁷ Framework for Outcomes Assessment, The Commission on Higher Education of the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges, 1996.

⁴⁸ Ibid.

association views assessment as the means to measure what institutions achieve. Institutional effectiveness begins with a mission statement (“what you say”), which should correspond closely with institutional functions (“what you do”). The institution’s effectiveness in fulfilling these functions is assessed (“what you achieve”), and the results of this assessment are used for institutional change and renewal (“what needs to be improved”).⁴⁹ The third purpose, accountability, addresses the need for the institution to be accountable to the public, particularly for student learning. Again, MSACS gives institutions great latitude in establishing their assessment systems to demonstrate public accountability.

The Report on the 1995 Outcomes Assessment Survey identified nine aspects of assessment that should be completed in order to set the stage for developing an assessment plan. Based on the findings from the 1995 Outcomes Assessment Survey the Commission sponsors as many seminars as possible to assist institutions with completing the nine preliminary steps for developing a plan; collegially developing a plan on campus, the continuous administration of assessment plans, and post-assessment strategies (how to use the assessment findings). Training programs for member institutions have also been instituted.

Relations with State Agencies

MSACS further reported that its relationships with the state agencies (or their equivalent in non-states) were “informal.” According to MSACS, during the 1990s the association engaged in informal discussions with both the Pennsylvania State System of Higher Education and the New Jersey Excellence and Accountability Committee regarding the role of assessment in the accreditation process. The states’ perspective on their relationships with MSACS reflects an informal nature, at best. Of the MSACS member states or territories, only New York referred explicitly to MSACS in saying, “The State Department of Education is also moving toward a closer working relationship with the association...as a means of assuring consistency in standards as well as efficiencies in staff time and cost.”

Evaluation

Middle States has made a clear commitment to engaging their member institutions in exploring questions of student learning - what they should learn and how well they are doing it. An institution is effective when it is asking these questions and doing something with the answers they find. The emphasis is now dual - enhancing institutional effectiveness in terms of teaching and learning and the effectiveness of the institution as a whole.

⁴⁹ Ibid.

Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges

Founded in 1917, the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges (NWACS) today serves as the regional accreditation agency for 156 institutions of higher education in seven states: Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, and Washington. NWACS is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council on Higher Education Accreditation as the official regional accreditation agency for these seven states. With the Northwest Association, there has been less focus on assessment for institutions, and thus there is less to report.

Criteria and Approach

NWACS has established a series of nine standards that institutions must meet as part of the accreditation process. These standards are institutional mission and goals; educational program and its effectiveness; students; faculty; library and information resources; governance and administration; finance; physical resources; and institutional integrity. In 1992, under Standard Two on the educational program and its effectiveness, NWACS adopted Policy 2.2 dealing specifically with educational assessment. Policy 2.2 was intended to provide greater definition of the standard for institutions to follow. According to this policy, NWACS “expects each institution and program to adopt an assessment plan responsive to its mission and its needs. In so doing, [NWACS] urges the necessity of a continuing process of academic planning, the carrying out of those plans, the assessment of the outcomes, and the influencing of the planning process by the assessment activities.” In crafting Policy 2.2, NWACS recognized that the education of students is “implicit in the mission statement of every institution.”⁵⁰

Methods and Processes

In its updated standards, clearer expectations are drawn that institutions will have clearly defined processes for assessing educational programs and that expected learning outcomes for each its degree and certification programs will be published. The association, however, does not identify or mandate what those competencies might or should be. The criteria require supporting documents for Standard 5: Educational Program Effectiveness includes instruments, procedures, and documents demonstrating appraisal of program outcomes as they relate to students. The standard also requires institutions to publish expected learning outcomes and demonstrate that their students have achieved these outcomes. Additionally institutions must demonstrate that their assessment activities lead to the improvement of teaching and learning.

As an association, NWACS expected institutional assessment to be the responsibility of the faculty on the individual campuses, suggesting a very decentralized approach. Policy 2.2 provides an “illustrative and exemplary” list of outcomes measures that institutions may consider in developing their own assessment policies. This list is summarized below:

- Student information—source of students (directly from high school or transferred from other institutions); student demographics (ethnicity, age, gender)
- Mid-program assessment—changes over time in student performance in writing, mathematics, and other required courses

⁵⁰ Accreditation Handbook of the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges, 1992.

- End-of-program assessment—student retention and graduation rates and changes in these rates over time; retention and graduation rates by demographics; student performance in capstone experiences
- Program review and specialized accreditation—academic program review, conducted either internally by the institution or by external specialized accrediting agencies
- Alumni satisfaction and loyalty—surveys of alumni to determine satisfaction with the quality of education they received
- Drop-outs and non-completers—student attrition rates; the reasons for student attrition
- Employment and employer satisfaction—student employment rates after graduation; surveys of employers to evaluate job readiness of graduates

Institutional Support

Contained within the standards for self-study is one pertaining to educational program effectiveness. Educational effectiveness is defined in terms of the change it brings about in students. It also states that program planning is based on regular and continuous assessment. Standard 5B1 notes that institutional assessment programs must be clearly defined, regular, and integrated into institution planning and evaluation mechanisms. Standard 5B3 requires institutions to provide evidence that their assessment activities lead to improvement of teaching and learning.

Policy 25 gives illustrative, although not prescriptive, examples of outcome measures (e.g. writing, quantitative skills) and assessment processes (e.g., alumni surveys, student satisfaction inventories). Other than that, there did not seem to be any other materials that provided evidence of how this association supports institutions in their assessment activities or trains evaluators for examining assessment practices of institutions.

Relations with State Agencies

The 1997 report further indicated that from the perspective of the association, there was no apparent relationship between NWACS and the state higher education agencies of the seven member states. Considered from the perspective of the state agencies, however, there was some evidence of the association's influence on state assessment policy.⁵¹ Alaska reported that the NWACS assessment requirement for self-study was an influence on the state's Educational Effectiveness Policy, implemented in 1996. The Nevada Board of Regents reported that NWACS' greater emphasis on assessment compelled campuses in that state to respond with an appropriate assessment scheme. Utah indicated that accreditation, at both the regional and disciplinary levels, was "essential to maintaining quality." The other member states—Idaho, Montana, Oregon, and Washington—did not articulate a relationship between regional association policies and state assessment activities.

Evaluation

The accreditation standards call for the use of evaluation activities to improve instructional programs, the integration of evaluation and planning processes to identify institutional priorities for improvement, and indicates that institutions must demonstrate that its assessment activities lead to

⁵¹ Ibid.

improvement of teaching and learning. Standard 5B2 requires institutions to publish expected learning outcomes and demonstrate that their students have achieved these outcomes. Additionally institutions must demonstrate that their assessment activities lead to the improvement of teaching and learning. It is not apparent that NWASC is doing anything to gauge the effect of their policies on the assessment practices and policies of the institutions they serve.

Related to NWACS, this analysis revealed that there was substantial flexibility in the association's approach to assessment at its member institutions. In terms of outcome measures, NWACS "highlighted" a varied list: problem solving, analysis, synthesis, making judgment, reasoning, and communicating."⁵² These measures did not differ significantly from the outcomes measures of the other five regional accrediting associations, which also focused on learning, reasoning, and communicating. The 1997 analysis also found that NWACS allowed member institutions to use "varied" processes to measure student outcomes, meaning both qualitative and quantitative measures.⁵³

The NWACS experience, not unlike those of other regional associations (as well as states and institutions, for that matter), has featured an evolution from assessment of inputs to assessment of outcomes. These inputs included the "range and variety of graduate degrees held by members of the faculty, the number of books in the library, the quality of specialized laboratory equipment, and the like."⁵⁴ In the 1980s and 1990s, NWACS moved along with the rest of the nation to a more careful consideration of outcomes, which better reflect what students have learned during their educational careers. But NWACS has also been careful not to prescribe the kind of outcomes information that institutions should use in their assessments.

⁵² Nettles, M, Cole, J.J.K., & Sharp, S, 1997. Benchmarking assessment: Assessment of teaching and learning in higher education and public accountability: State governing, coordinating board and regional accreditation association policies and practices.

⁵³ Ibid.

⁵⁴ Ibid.

North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

History

During 1989-1991, NCA began its assessment initiative, focusing on assessment in its regional meetings and newsletters. In October 1989, NCA developed the Statement on the Assessment of Student Academic Achievement (ASAA), which was approved in 1990 and revised in 1993 and again in 1996. In September 1994, the NCA Handbook of Accreditation included a chapter on assessment entitled *Special Focus: Assessing Student Academic Achievement*. The association required all member institutions to submit plans for assessing student academic achievement by June 1995. By the spring of 1996, consultant-evaluators had reviewed the majority of these institutional assessment plans, and the findings were published in a paper by Cecilia Lopez to member institutions entitled *Opportunities for Improvement: Advice from Consultant-Evaluators on Programs to Assess Student Learning*. At this time, revisions were begun to the Handbook of Accreditation in which Criteria Three and Four which cover assessment set much more explicit expectations for assessment, stating that student academic achievement is an “essential component of evaluating overall institutional effectiveness.”

Criteria and Approach

The accreditation process is presented as a means of providing public assurance of an institution’s effectiveness and a stimulus to institutional improvement. The Higher Learning Commission of NCA has five criteria for accreditation, and its policy for assessment can be taken from Criteria Three, which asks whether institutions are meeting objectives, and Criteria Four, involves planning and includes the use of assessment information as evidence.

Criteria Three requires that that “the institution is accomplishing its educational and other purposes.” One of the appropriate patterns for evidence of this criterion is “assessment of appropriate student academic achievement in all its programs.” The four areas for documentation of this evidence are:

- Proficiency in skills and competencies essential for college-educated students
- Completion of an identifiable and coherent undergraduate level general education component
- Mastery of the level of knowledge appropriate to the degree granted
- Control by the institution’s faculty of student learning and granting of academic credit

Criteria Four requires that “the institution can continue to accomplish its purposes and strengthen its institutional effectiveness.” It seeks evidence of “structured assessment processes that are continuous, involve a variety of educational constituencies, and that provide meaningful and useful information to the planning processes...”

NCA focuses on student academic achievement using both direct and indirect measures. The goal is to ensure students are meeting the objectives of their academic programs. Academic achievement means student learning in terms of abilities and cognitive changes, rather than affective outcomes such as values. The Statement on Assessment of Student Academic Achievement, which is embedded in Criteria Three, asserts that assessing student academic achievement is an essential

component of evaluating overall institutional effectiveness, which is an essential part of the accreditation process. NCA states that implicit in the values of higher education is the mastery of a rigorous body of knowledge and students' abilities to conceptualize, analyze, and integrate; use their intellect; examine their values; consider divergent views; engage with their peers and teachers in the exchange of ideas and attitudes. These values, however, never appear as a list of desired outcomes to be measured.

Methods and Processes

NCA neither provides a definition of student academic achievement, nor prescribes a specific approach to assessment. The only mandate is that while institutions might utilize a number of institutional outcomes in documenting their effectiveness, all institutions must have and describe a program that documents student academic achievement. The association has only two general expectations of institutions, which is that they must cover major fields and general education objectives. An explicit expectation is that data from multiple, direct and indirect indicators such as pre- and post-testing, portfolio assessments, alumni and employer surveys will be collected, and that multiple data collection methods will be used. Beyond these stated expectations, NCA and its evaluators believe that individual academic departments and units should have the flexibility determine the extent to which they actually contribute to the incremental learning of their students.

The NCA expects institutions to follow the guidelines in its Policies for Institutional Affiliation, from its Handbook of Accreditation. Additional guidelines for institutions specifically related to student assessment were instituted in March of 2000. These are known as the Levels of Implementation and were established to be a tool to (1) assist institutions in understanding and strengthening their programs for assessment of student academic achievement and (2) provide evaluation teams with some useful characteristics, or descriptors, of progress to inform their consultation and their recommendations related to those programs.

These levels serve as guidelines to help institutions and evaluators judge the development of assessment programs at different places and levels of institutions. They are not indicators for performance but rather, markers for recognizing the nature and characteristics of an assessment program's evolution. The three phases are: Beginning Implementation, Making Progress, and Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement. These phases are examined across each of four areas seen as critical for implementing assessment. These are:

- Institutional Culture, comprised of shared values and mission
- Shared Responsibility, examining faculty, administration, and students
- Institutional Support, consisting of resources and structures
- Efficacy of Assessment

This is a peer review process in which an NCA evaluation team reviews institutional statements and conducts interviews. The visiting team characterizes the activities of the departments engaged in assessment and suggests improvements. When making recommendations, there are essentially three types of follow-up that are proposed. First, the team can call for a focused visit when the predominant pattern of characteristics locates the institution at Level One, and the team finds little evidence that much progress is being made toward Level Two. Second, institutions can be asked to deliver a monitoring report (within 3 years) if the visit team feels the institution is

not sure about where it should be. Typically, the predominant pattern of characteristics locates the institution at Level One, and the team finds good evidence that progress is being made toward Level Two. During this period they can ask for a follow-up site visit. Third, the team can for a progress report when an institution at Level Two appears not to be using or lacks the capacity to use data from the assessment program to improve its academic programs and enhance effective student learning. An institution must then show that it has an implementation plan and demonstrate how it is making progress towards its objectives.

Institutional Support

NCA provides several services to its member institutions to help them move up the Levels of Implementation. To move an institution up from Level 1, the liaison might recommend a specific consultant to bring ideas from the outside. This person could perhaps be from an exemplary institution and would work with the administration to enhance its implementation processes. Institutions would certainly be free to hire their own student assessment professionals, or assign control to someone internally, such as a registrar or someone else who doesn't traditionally hold power that would be viewed as objective. An institution at Level 2 might just be told to do some tweaking. About 70% of NCA's institutions have interim monitoring which can take one of several forms. The institutions can issue a follow up report or can schedule a focused visit to occur in the interim.

NCA recognizes that there are different levels of learning between two- and four-year institutions, but it doesn't have different expectations between associate's programs and four-year programs in terms of the basic skills students should be mastering. They realize that it is difficult to establish specific policies for the larger institutions and express doubt that value-added measures work in all cases.

NCA doesn't consult with institutions on a regular basis, but its representatives get involved in helping institutions make progress towards its goals. An institution's liaison will make an interim visit 12-18 months prior to the official accreditation visit to help the institution identify potential problems. Recommendations will be provided and documents made available to the institution to help with preparation for the visit. In addition, NCA has other resources available on the web site to assist all institutions, and it regularly conducts workshops on assessment with AAHE for institutional personnel on the accreditation criteria.

The real goal and hope for NCA is that its member colleges and universities will eventually learn how to incorporate assessment into its ongoing institutional planning and management. In their relations with institutions, liaisons encourage administrators to increase their level of assessment activity on their campuses, compile and analyze the data to produce valuable information, and then use those results when conducting long-range planning initiatives. Institutions usually lag behind expectations, but they are finding that most are conducting assessment and more institutions are analyzing results. NCA holds that a faculty role in and responsibility for the assessment plan is integral to improved student learning. Additionally the importance of institution-wide support of the assessment activities from such entities as the governing board, senior executive officers, president/chancellor is considered essential for ensuring the long-range success of the assessment of student learning.

Relations with State Agencies

NCA maintains communications and discussions with state policymakers officers of state governing and coordinating boards, but these are generally informal conversations; there is no systematized coordination of goals, priorities, or methods with these groups. In 1990 and 1996 NCA surveyed the state higher education agencies of the nineteen states in their region, asking states about their expectations for assessment and their awareness of NCA's initiative assessing student academic achievement. It requested suggestions for ways in which the states and NCA might work together to link their expectations for assessment. This was the most formal episode of cooperation with these agencies.

There also does not appear to be a great deal of coordination and cooperation among the regional associations, although they have worked to adopt common principles, such as their efforts in distance education, although the associations have not duplicated that level of coordination in other areas. This could be because there are cultural differences among the regions of the country, and institutions have different expectations about how their regional association should operate.

Evaluation

The Commission's research continues into the effectiveness of the Levels of Implementation, and they have been revised each year since they were enacted. The goal is to make the levels and characteristics more flexible and more realistic regarding institutional experiences with the implementation of assessment programs. The association is also proud of its success with the Academic Quality Improvement Project (AQIP). This effort to incorporate quality improvement into institutions' management philosophies has an extensive self-assessment component. NCA consultants help guide institutions through improvement before their next visit, and NCA feels that the accreditation process has been influenced by its AQIP in that it is becoming more consultative.

NCA is currently engaged in reviewing its accreditation criteria in a project entitled, "Restructuring Expectations: Accreditation 2004." The new focus adopted by the Commission envisages a more dynamic, forward looking, institutionally inclusive, and flexible approach to accreditation. It will embrace continuing education and other non-degree oriented higher learning activity, incorporate the changing delivery systems for higher learning with the advent and rapid evolution of information technology, and expect more complete and valid measurements of what students in all forms of higher education are actually learning.

CHAPTER THREE: CASE SYNTHESIS

Introduction

Chapter 2 presented case study narratives for each of the five states and regional accreditation association cases. This chapter is a synthesis of the five case study state policies and the standards of the three regional accreditation associations. The focus is upon contrasting major components of these policies and the effect of political interactions among major players in the process to illustrate the variety in style and substance of the selected state assessment policies and accreditation standards. The analyses include an examination of the policy contexts the policy design, implementation, and outcomes.

States were compared along the following six dimensions:

- History & Originating Dynamics – a discussion of what state action led to policy development
- Purpose & Objectives – outlines the intentions of the policy and the states’ policy priorities
- Design & Features – how the policy functions after implementation, including data collection
- Leadership & Management – the roles and actions of policymakers and institutional actors
- Policy Outcomes– the actual results from the policy, as well as their implications
- Conditions Shaping Policy Outcomes –how the policy objectives were made actionable and the extent to which they were achieved.

History and Origins

Policy Context

The origin of the assessment policies in the five case study states, like those of the other 39 states that have policies, is the legislative branch, the executive branch, a SHEEO agency or a combination. Several factors appear to provoke state higher education agencies and legislatures to introduce and establish assessment policies. SHEEOs have sought to focus the goals of the higher education system as a whole and for each institution. Primary motives for assessment policies originating from SHEEO agencies is that less formal initiatives to coordinate the colleges and universities and focus the missions of the colleges and universities did not result in extensive institutional engagement on accountability or quality assurance. Chapter 2 revealed how this occurred in New York when the Office of Higher Education required the colleges and universities to focus upon assessment after several years of pursuing other initiatives like report cards and program review. SHEEOs have also developed assessment policies in response to inquiries from legislatures concerning how the quality or reputation of its colleges and universities compare with their counterparts in other states. The motive then is upon increasing the prestige or perceived quality of its own colleges and universities. When South Carolina's CHE brought attention to the relative position of its colleges and universities compared to those in neighboring states, legislative action ensued, whereas the Florida Board established the need for quality, which it defined as better institutional performance and effectiveness.

The dynamics surrounding higher education assessment in the states include sharpening the focus of the colleges and universities upon student achievement, enhancing the quality of academic

programs statewide, making colleges and universities more responsive to public demands, establishing fiscal control and accountability, and facilitating the appropriations process with the state legislature. The policy context in Washington was the perceived need to improve the quality of undergraduate education in the public colleges and universities. The Washington HECB sought a better method for evaluating academic programs and encouraged its colleges and universities to use assessment to provide more information to policymakers about institutional performance. Outcomes assessment became a critical element to the Higher Education Coordinating Board's Master Plan. In Missouri, one important issue in the articulation of statewide goals for higher education was that legislators had doubts about the effectiveness of the public colleges and universities toward accomplishing their missions. Missouri legislators intervened to establish an assessment policy because of their sense that some colleges and universities were operating beyond the scope of their missions, leading them to be ineffective and too costly.

Statewide or system planning, a typical role of SHEEOS, also provides a context for assessment policy development. Typically, state higher education planning is a process in which higher education leaders and policymakers meet to decide a common vision for the college and university system and for each institution. Both the planning process and the final plan can lead to significant changes and new policies. Two states in this study, Washington and Florida, made increasing institutional effectiveness a major component of a master plan for higher education. Washington wanted to develop a measure of performance evaluation at the two-year level by measuring outcomes in basic skills, technical training, and transfer education, while Florida sought to instill quality and effectiveness as core values of the colleges and universities by requiring them to conduct assessment. The policy in Washington emerged from its state master planning process and developed as the coordinating board determined how best to implement its recommendations. Separate development processes were instituted for two- and four-year colleges and universities in an effort to ensure measurement of the appropriate outcomes in the two sectors. Master planning was also important in Florida as the Board of Education attempted to direct colleges and universities to embrace quality and effectiveness. The planning process focused colleges and universities on quality in higher education, the need to review general education and other curriculum, and to embrace testing and other means of integrating assessment into their activities. Also, it was the master planning process that first introduced the idea of linking funding to performance in some manner. In Missouri CBHE developed a strategic plan that was designed to focus all colleges and universities on the same priorities, as well as introduce a process to monitor progress towards achieving the priorities. New York and South Carolina did not move their policies along through their normal planning cycle, but rather through extraordinary circumstances.

Another path for policy emergence is that of direct legislative or gubernatorial intervention. Elected officials develop an acute interest in the performance of higher education for a variety of reasons but the most prominent include the rising cost and rapid increases in appropriations requests, complaints from constituents about access, quality or quality of service, and report cards that show the relative state of the state's colleges and universities or the higher education system. The states with the most active legislatures are South Carolina and Florida. In response to concerns about relative quality and institutional effectiveness, the South Carolina legislature passed a series of laws that moved assessment from requiring colleges and universities to collect and report data, to authorizing the SHEEO to collect more detailed information on performance, to finally instituting the most complete performance mechanism in the nation. Florida's legislature has promoted assessment by requesting more information from colleges and universities on performance in areas of productivity, effectiveness, and efficiency, and also by altering the process for appropriating

institutional funding. In doing so, it has established state priorities of effectiveness taking the form of cost-effectiveness.

State assessment policies are also established by statutory action requiring responses and results by the state's colleges and universities. The actions of legislators take several forms. The legislatures in several states require that increasing amounts of data be collected and made available to the public about higher education. The legislatures in South Carolina under Acts 629 and 255, in Washington under their performance funding targets, and in Missouri with the Student Achievement Study, all instituted such policies. In each case the legislation authorized the SHEEO in the state to coordinate data collection, enhancing their power in relation to their colleges and universities. Legislatures have also mandated that colleges and universities be accountable through a performance-funding mechanism, as is the case in South Carolina and Washington. South Carolina instituted the most extensive program in the nation, while in Washington, after expanding the data requirements for two-year colleges for about 10 years, the legislature directed the Coordinating Board to institute a performance-funding program during the 1997-1999 biennium that focused four-year colleges and universities on a few goals. This action resulted in clear goals that revealed the legislatures priorities for higher education in the state. Data collection in these states represent the first step in accountability, but attaching funding consequences completes the process of instituting accountability programs. The Florida legislature is currently developing a performance based budgeting system for institutional accountability. New York does not have such a funding program, but the SUNY Regents unsuccessfully attempted to institute one in 1994. Legislative action in New York primarily took the form of public critique and requests that the Regents and the State Education Department take action to increase the quality of colleges and universities.

A common precursor to adopting a policy in the states is the formation of task forces or blue ribbon committees to study higher education and recommend policy options. Legislators have commissioned studies or authorized the SHEEOs to undertake them. Higher education agencies also establish their own advisory panels or special commissions out their own volition. Typically, these panels or commissions are comprised of business/community leaders, institutional representatives such as presidents, and government officials, including legislative/gubernatorial staff or SHEEO officers. Several of the states had this element in the early history of their policy development. For example, after the Task Force on Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness issued its report in 1999, New York colleges and universities were directed by the Board of Trustees for the University of the State, the State Department of Education, and the SUNY Board to develop comprehensive educational effectiveness plans and submit them to the Commissioner of Education. They were also required to submit reports to the Office of Higher Education regarding their performance; these actions moved the policy from its formative stage to the implementation stage. In South Carolina, Act 157 established blue ribbon committee to study the obstacles to improvement, and their findings became the force behind the performance funding initiative.

Individual colleges and universities are also influential in shaping state assessment policies. Three instances were observed in this study where the initiatives of individual colleges and universities influenced actions of policymakers. Northeast Missouri State University adopted assessment practices without mandates or requirements. NEMSU was seeking to attract students by demonstrating its quality. Its experimentation with assessment in the late 1970s led to a nationally-recognized value-added assessment program by the mid- 1980s. Subsequently, because of the attention attracted, the governor advocated extending the practice to the other colleges and universities in the state. In Florida, the State University System began a program review process in

the 1970s, which prompted the legislature to take notice and become involved in the assessment and quality debate. Florida, the State University System began a program review process in the 1970s, which prompted the legislature to take notice and become involved in the assessment and quality debate. This interest led the legislature to pass an accountability law and other provisions requiring colleges and universities to focus on many indicators of quality, like faculty productivity and institutional efficiency. The foci in all these initiatives were not prompted by any state action but by internal management needs of the colleges and universities. In New York, the SUNY system study of general education in the individual colleges and universities inspired the state system to enact an assessment policy. The colleges and universities in South Carolina and New York did not launch assessment practices independent of the state policy.

Combinations of these initiatives have emerged from larger policy issues. In Florida, for example, there has been a continuing effort by the legislature and the State Board of Education to integrate the K-12 and postsecondary education sectors. Consequently, new comprehensive policy initiatives have evolved. Overall, the state has a planned accountability program for the state colleges and universities that drives all other policy considerations regarding assessment. Another important element is public perception by a public that increasingly see itself as consumers. The public frequently drives political will and in all five states, and we observed how public perception prompts action on policymakers. Elections can generate new mandates for reform of government generally, and higher education is not exempted. The most powerful illustration of this is that in two states, the 1994 elections, which resulted in a shift in power over to political conservatives, ushered in many reform initiatives. In New York, the new policymakers increased their scrutiny of the performance and administration of SUNY, and sought ways to make the system more efficient. Lawmakers in Washington were intent on having all government entities, including colleges and universities, become more accountable for the manner in which they used public funds.

Purpose and Objectives

Policy Types

The type of policy a state adopts depends upon the purposes policymakers establish for assessment, and the purposes and objectives reflect the priorities that they seek for colleges and universities direct their attention. Our analysis of the five states leads us to conclude that there are four types of assessment policies that states adopt for higher education:

- Quality Assurance
- Institutional Improvement
- Accountability
- Student Learning

The characteristics of the four types are described below. Each of the five states has some common and distinctive purposes and objectives that reflect the type of policy they establish. A common emphasis is upon generating data and information to serve as evidence that the purposes are being fulfilled.

The first is a policy focused on *quality assurance*, which typically emphasizes assessment practices that seeks to improve quality or at least give the public some assurance that quality is a priority for state policymakers. While each of the states places some emphasis upon quality assurance, there is no single definition of quality. Common assessment practice includes requiring

colleges and universities to demonstrate that they are achieving their missions. Missouri colleges and universities are required to submit data on 24 statewide indicators of quality, with each institution's evaluation based on its own baseline data. Quality can also be assured by having institutions demonstrate their overall effectiveness, most often through a performance-based funding system. South Carolina has the most extensive system in the nation, with 37 indicators grouped into nine categories, with targets unique to each institution. Missouri has a simpler system, focusing on 10 indicators of quality important to legislators, such as graduation and retention rates. The legislature in Washington has established separate performance categories for two- and four-year institutions, but each assessment plan must satisfy the two broad state goals of institutional self-evaluation for improvement, and institutional accountability for quality. Maintaining standards of effectiveness and productivity has long been a focus in Florida, as the state has been trying for over a decade to link accountability to budgeting. State priorities established through legislative studies include broad categories of efficiency and productivity such as graduation, retention, and course completion rates.

The second type is *institutional improvement*. Institutional improvement refers to improving educational programs, institutional management, and teaching and learning. The policies in New York and Washington are designed to make assessment a link between gathering more information about institutional performance and improving education. All New York institutions are now in the process of developing their effectiveness plans that will document how they will use assessment to demonstrate student learning and institutional improvement. Colleges and universities in Washington each have their own set of broad goals for which they must submit data to document their achievement of state priorities, such as transfer and student success in basic skills for two-year schools, and quantitative, writing, and major assessment at four-year institutions. Missouri and Florida also emphasize performance, productivity, and efficiency with indicators focusing on success and completion rates, number of transfers to four-year schools, and enrollment rates for students from underrepresented groups.

The third policy type focuses upon *accountability*. In this context each college and university is held responsible by an external authority for reporting achievement of particular standards of performance, such as the governor or the legislature. Typically, the authority defines minimal levels of performance, or the institution and the authority agree upon targets/goals. The targets are typically defined either at the level of the individual institution. In South Carolina, institutions are evaluated against their own unique targets for indicators in nine categories, such as faculty quality, administrative efficiency, and alumni achievements. Institutions can be evaluated for contributing to broader state goals, as is the case in Missouri with priorities like educational attainment, job placement, and achieving institutional mission, or in Florida with their priorities of access, diversity, and quality. Such policies also include budgetary considerations as a means of enforcement, either as incentives or as rewards and punishments. Missouri and South Carolina use appropriations as rewards for meeting predetermined targets of performance, as the money is contingent upon performance and can be taken away if targets are not met. Appropriations serve as incentives in Florida and Washington, as colleges and universities and entire systems are encouraged to reach for goals that help the state achieve its overall goals for higher education. When budget decisions are made, institutional and overall system performance are evaluated as a whole for contributions toward the broad state goals, rather than having specific dollar amounts tied to one certain target on a particular indicator. Also, money is not taken away for failure to meet goals; it is simply not awarded as an addition to base funding.

The fourth policy type is concerned with *student learning*. In this policy schema colleges and universities are required to demonstrate student learning gains. The institution needs to have

students exhibit levels of performance on either measures of general skills and competencies or on tests of specific knowledge related to general education and/or major field curricula. The policies in Florida and Missouri have prominent testing components, and require students to take tests after the completion of certain levels and programs or prior to entry to demonstrate readiness. (Specific tests are outlined in the design features section of this chapter.) Colleges and universities are not rewarded or punished based on student test scores, primarily due to uncertainty regarding test reliability, validity, and institutional resistance. In New York and Washington, outcomes assessment is encouraged as part of institutional effectiveness plans, but the state focuses only on aggregated data from colleges and universities, rather than the performance of students on particular examinations.

Policy Goals

Several states explicitly articulate a goal of achieving quality assurance and maintaining quality in higher education. Their focus is on institutional quality, although this is defined in a variety of ways, and assessment is the tool for measuring achievement. New York provides an example as the Office of Higher Education places the onus on institutions to develop and implement assessment plans to demonstrate their institutional effectiveness, with the stated goal that the plans produce improvement in student learning. Also, Act 629 in South Carolina requires the periodic collection of information from colleges and universities on six goals: (1) general education; (2) major fields and concentrations; (3) academic advising; (4) academic success of transfer students (from two-year to four-year colleges and universities); (5) student development; and (6) library resources and services. The CHE makes judgments about institutional quality based upon the data it collects from the colleges and universities.

The states define quality in many different ways. Florida stresses quality at the institutional level and emphasizes institutional efficiency and productivity. The state uses multiple throughput and output measures, which institutions submit to the Florida Board, who then compiles the data for the legislature. These indicators have changed in number and type many times over the past decade, but often include measures of faculty time, graduation rates, and job placement into priority fields. Quality in Missouri is interpreted as colleges and universities demonstrating what they advertise in their publications and how they are fulfilling their stated mission. Achieving institutional mission and mission differentiation are major aspects of quality assurance in Missouri, as all institutions are required to articulate a mission that shows how they will meet state needs. They must also operate in such a manner that minimizes program duplication and evidences assessment activity to achieve better performance on the states 24 statewide goals for higher education.

Institutional improvement, in various forms, is a goal in each of the states but they have different ways of expressing the goal. For example, quality assurance through continuous institutional improvement is the stated goal of the evaluation program in Washington, which states that it allows for reflection on institutional performance, while its original assessment initiatives had the goal of improving undergraduate education. Missouri and the SUNY system administration each define the goal of institutional improvement as improving teaching and student learning, while, as noted above, Washington saw institutional improvement as the way to achieve quality.

Accountability is a term that the states frequently use and there are several ways that they go about achieving it. South Carolina compares its own colleges and universities to peer institutions in neighboring states. Policymakers often consider accountability to be that the colleges and

universities provide information on stated goals or indicators. Washington and Florida both make such requirements of their colleges and universities. The broadest definition of accountability is the achievement of goals for public system or the entire state. All states except New York in this study articulated a goal of having higher education meet the expectations. In Washington, accountability and assessment are two different concepts because officials feel the former doesn't produce improvement. And in the state, the former is done at the system level while the latter at the institutional level. Finally, student preparation is the central concern of accountability and involves colleges and universities demonstrating that they are improving the skills and readiness of students for life after college. Florida uses assessment to measure and track the development of academic skills in students.

None of the states has policies that could be considered expressly focused solely on student learning, but all five states have student learning elements incorporated into their policies. In New York, the task force report that led to the current policy called for colleges and universities to demonstrate that they are performing regular assessment of student outcomes. In Washington colleges and universities are required to develop assessment plans, and give evidence of specific outcomes of communications, computation, and critical thinking. Missouri has a long history of testing, going back to the original initiatives of NEMSU and the state's Student Achievement Study in the late 1980s. It continues requiring students to be assessed at the end of the sophomore year, and includes assessment of graduates among its FFR criteria. Finally, Florida has an extensive testing program, although most of it is focused on ensuring that students are ready to enter college and prepared to do the work, although some such as CLAST and the Florida Teacher Certification Examination (FTCE) assess rising juniors and teacher candidates.

Design and Features

Structures

Similarity in objectives does not translate into identical or even similar policies among the states. The fact that these five states have been deliberating and acting on policy options and structures for several years appears to have moved them beyond the early days of accountability where states copied one another's "best practices." The policies these states have implemented are all different, paralleling one another only occasionally and usually only in broad structural features rather than specific practices. In the five states, there are three types of broad policy structures—a decentralized approach, a centrally-guided approach, and one state that has a combination of these.

New York and Washington have decentralized assessment policies. New York's Quality Assurance Initiative has four broad goals, the first of which is for the colleges and universities to submit effectiveness plans to the State Education Department by 2003. This provision recognizes the autonomy of colleges and universities and allows them to define effectiveness, and collect, analyze and control most of the data. The state is only concerned with aggregate data and does not use the assessment outcomes in the appropriations process. The colleges and universities typically submit reports to the Commissioner of Education.

Washington's policy is operated by the HECB, with only broad goals established by the legislature in the following five areas: undergraduate graduation efficiency, undergraduate student retention, five-year graduation rates, faculty productivity, and institution-specific measures. The HECB requires colleges and universities to develop evaluation programs, but the methods of measurement are left up to the colleges and universities. There are no common processes or

instruments required. The colleges and universities are encouraged to either select from pre-existing national instruments to test general skills or to develop their own instruments to assess what is actually taught. As such, there is tremendous variety in the level and quality of assessment among the colleges and universities. The system level assessment plans focus on curriculum, programs, and skills and competencies of students. The Washington HECB--through its master plan-- and Republicans in the state legislature both sought to establish a connection between assessment and institutional improvement by making information on student outcomes available to policymakers and the HECB.

Missouri also has two levels of assessment activity but the policy is centrally-guided by the Legislature and the Coordination Board, unlike those in either New York or Washington. The levels exist first and foremost because the Funding for Results program involves all of the public colleges and universities colleges and universities and requires a central administrative agent to establish rules and regulations and to administer the program. In addition, Missouri has statewide goals for all of higher education to which each college and university must demonstrate that it is making a contribution, and there are also goals that each must articulate and achieve their stated institutional mission. These come from the state's master plan, which set the three goals of access, quality, and efficiency. Because of the different levels, there are two reward structures. Regarding other assessment activity, all colleges and universities follow state requirement to test students after two years, and there are a variety of instruments used. Some nationally developed tests are prescribed statewide, and some are locally developed.

South Carolina also has a centralized assessment policy, administered by the Commission on Higher Education, which allows less institutional autonomy than the policy in Missouri. Its legislative mandate requires annual or periodic institutional or system reports regarding effectiveness. The legislature also grants power to the CHE to require the colleges and universities to submit information on indicators that were established by the Commission. The CHE submits reports to the Governor and/or Legislature that include comparisons with colleges and universities in neighboring states on some of the performance indicators like student retention and graduation rates, student admissions test scores, and job placement of graduates. Most recently, the state has developed a complex performance-indicator system on which to base budgetary allocations to colleges and universities. All colleges and universities are scored on a set of 37 indicators in nine broad areas using targets unique to each institution and agreed upon in advance. Although the original plan intended to have 100% of funding contingent on performance, the reality is that only 3-5% of institutional is truly in play.

The state of Florida offers a combination of these approaches because there are so many different parts to the assessment process and they often occurring simultaneously. There are required tests for students to demonstrate readiness for college (Florida Comprehensive Test), for placement/remediation (the College Placement Test), after the sophomore year to assess skills (College Level Academic Skills Test), and for teacher candidates (Florida Teacher Certification Examination). Some selective colleges and universities, like the University of Florida, have tried to negotiate with the Division of Colleges and Universities of the State Board of Education for waivers or alternatives for these tests because their students don't take the College Placement Test. Florida also has the College Level Examination Placement (CLEP) tests, which are administered under the Bright Futures Scholarship Program, which requires students to make an attempt to accelerate through their degree programs by receiving credit for courses by testing out of them. For this they must take five CLEP tests to seek credit for courses.

The state legislature also sets guidelines for colleges and universities for accountability and budgetary concerns. Colleges and universities are held to statewide goals for efficiency, effectiveness, productivity, and serving the state's needs. State colleges and universities must submit information to the State Board of Education for the warehousing and analysis of student and institutional data. The one aspect of assessment in which colleges and universities have the most flexibility and control is the program review process. Both are internal, peer review types of methods. In program review, faculty who are most closely connected with the disciplines are allowed to set the standards and evaluate programs. Currently, public colleges and universities are required by law to review each major program every five years. Community colleges collect data annually, while all vocational programs have different schedules for review that are prompted by an assessment of the quality of graduates' preparation for professional work. All programs in a discipline at all colleges and universities across the state are reviewed at one time and then summarized into one report providing a description of the discipline nationally and in the state, with individual reports on the programs in each college or university. Colleges and universities are also involved in educational audits, initiated by the Division of Colleges and Universities, which allow them to certify student learning in their programs. Colleges and universities must develop methods and produce reports that show the legislature how and what students are learning. Finally, Florida is finding new ways to organize and make use of the data it collects. These policy elements will be discussed in the next section.

Data Collection

One of the most important findings to emerge from these case studies is that states are expanding their reliance upon data and are accelerating the development of data systems. The continuing implementation of the assessment policies in each of the five states is resulting in improved data collection, analysis, and dissemination. There has also been an upsurge in the use of data for decision-making purposes. The growing importance of data and performance has caused more stakeholders to demand information about colleges and universities and the higher education system. These external stakeholders include students and parents, business and industry, employers, and governments; all require data for their needs. We observed three types of data collection and management methods: 1) institutional collection, aggregation and reporting of vital statistics and performance indicators, 2) departmental and institutionally administered testing, and 3) state-managed comprehensive centralized databases.

Institutional data collection and reporting is the mode in states having decentralized assessment practices. New York and Washington are the two states that make use of this approach. Colleges and universities were directed to collect data to demonstrate quality and implementation of assessment but were not given specific directives for how or what to collect, so long as the outcomes showed attainment of state priorities. In some cases this produced uneven implementation, but it also preserved institutional flexibility and autonomy. South Carolina created an entirely new data collection system, where institutions report to the CHE on performance indicators. Missouri officials were concerned with increasing use of data collected by colleges and universities; there was a sense that information was reaching institutional managers and administrators but was not fully used at the department or faculty levels. The Coordinating Board is working with colleges and universities to increase the flow of information. In all of these types of systems, information is aggregated and flows up the system to decision-makers.

Departmentally or institutionally administered Instruments and testing are used in several of the states favoring more centralized forms of implementation. The Missouri assessment policy, for example, requires two ETS exams statewide to assess sophomores and seniors—the Academic Profile Test and the Major Field Achievement Test. It also uses the C-BASE exam -- an instrument developed to meet state needs at Missouri-Columbia -- for general education competency, as well as exams such as the GRE and the National Teachers Examination. Florida is also a state that makes extensive use of exams, although most of its were developed by state officials to meet specific needs. There are several for placement (Florida Comprehensive Test and the College Placement Test), one to accelerate degrees (Bright Futures), and one for knowledge (CLAST). Florida has made some use of its data, although this has been primarily focused upon increasing student preparation for and entry into college. For instance, the Readiness for College Report lists passage rates for students on all parts of the College Placement Test by high school, but the report is primarily beneficial to high school administrators. It provides little in the way of assessment information to postsecondary officials and does not lend itself to detailed statistical analyses. Also, the Bright Futures Test data is summarized, but again, this is data that is most useful to those preparing students for college.

The third data management method is developing a state-managed centralized database. Florida is the most prominent example of this as it is developing its K-20 Data Warehouse to collect and manage detailed information about every student in its education system. Officials hope the system will enable them to track students over the years to determine how particular classes, teachers, colleges and universities, and experiences affect what students know and how prepared they are to perform in subsequent education levels and the workplace. Concurrent with this data warehouse is the database maintained by the Florida Education and Training Placement Information Program (FETPIP). This program tracks graduates into employment and also gauges employer satisfaction with their work and academic preparation. It is student-centered, with an emphasis on employment outcomes, positions, and salary. It will also facilitate an analysis of the supply and demand between number of graduates in a field and placement.

Use of Data

Collecting and analyzing data are important but using it is also a critical element of state assessment policies. The data and information that are gathered from colleges and universities and higher education systems are used in general ways: 1) to decide rewards, 2) to decide incentives, and 3) to increase public awareness.

Using data as rewards involves granting colleges and universities some form of payment in return for demonstrating that they having met stated goals. Missouri and South Carolina employ this approach as part of their performance funding systems. Money is tied to the achievement of a pre-determined target and unless that target is met, the colleges and universities do not receive available funding. The money at stake is generally no more than 3-5% of base funding. In Florida data are used for decision making in an incentive-based funding system. The legislature and the State Board sought to have more colleges and universities engage in assessment activities and to have colleges and universities submit evidence of performance in specific areas. Data are used to determine which colleges and universities receive more funding above the formula, but they do not lose formula generated funding if they fail to achieve state goals. Finally, several states seek to improve the quality of information that they provide to parents and students, improving their position as consumers who have to make market-type decisions. Information is made available to the publicly through electronic and print mediums empowering consumers to influence change.

Links to Policy Objectives

The five state policies are complex and the goals they strive for are related to larger goals of the higher education system. There are the aspects of the policies that relate to specific objectives such as improving teaching and learning, which many of the central players in state assessment would claim as the most important of all objectives.

Differentiated by institutional type/sector

To the extent that each of the five states has succeeded in implementing their policies, part of the credit is due to their recognition of differences among their colleges and universities and their effort to craft policies that meet the variety of needs for improvement and accountability. For example, South Carolina structured its performance-funding program focusing upon the state's need for a unitary system of accountability, but later adjusted the goals and performance targets so that they would be different by sector, thereby allowing colleges and universities to work together with the CHE to set their own targets for many of the indicators. For example, colleges and universities serving different student populations would set different targets for such indicators as SAT scores of entering students, scores on general education outcomes, student persistence, and graduation rates. In New York the colleges and universities have been allowed to design their own assessment methods, so long as they meet state objectives. Institutional plans are not yet developed, but the Quality Assurance Initiative considered colleges and universities' missions and sectors as its recommendations were developed.

Meanwhile, the colleges and universities in Missouri and Florida are negotiating with their respective state policymakers for their programs to allow more distinction among the colleges and universities. Presently they are required to administer the same tests, set the same goals, and employ the same methods and timetables. Missouri's college and university officials would like policymakers to recognize the differences that come with selectivity. Those in Florida want the state to become more consistent with the indicators prescribed and also to recognize what processes meet institutional improvement needs versus which are burdensome. Officials at Florida State discussed with us how some of the data required to manage their institution, like dropout rates, fail to capture the complexity associated with who their students are and the variety of their backgrounds. Also, having requirements that change from year to year taxes their resources. The state of Florida also phased in its performance and incentive funding plans by starting with two-year colleges. It is now moving towards performance funding for all public colleges and universities.

Duplication in assessment

Coupled with recognition of differences among colleges and universities, there is a trend toward eliminating duplication of reporting requirements to external bodies that seek accountability from institutions. New York has made one of its four stated goals the reduction of overlap between the requirements of the legislature, Regents, and those of accrediting bodies. Missouri has simply made its 24 goals for the colleges and universities the outcomes that the CBHE measures to assess contribution to state needs. This allows all colleges and universities to focus on the state priorities for higher education in both their management and assessment practices, rather than having them be unrelated or working at cross-purposes. Washington has adopted a scaled-down version of this practice as the HECB sets goals for colleges and universities but allows each college and university to develop its own plans. Agreeing to a common set of state goals and assessment requirements is also the issue in Florida as it tries to coordinate the assessment needs of the legislature, the State

Board, and the accrediting bodies. It has done this to some extent in program review and is trying to move this into the accountability realm with a reduced number of indicators. The performance funding system is expected to accelerate this process.

Public accountability

Making institutional performance a matter of public record is evident in all of the states. In New York, one of the four goals of the Quality Assurance Initiative is for the Regents to publish statistics on the status and performance of higher education; the Commissioner of Education will also electronically publish institutional statistics in the hope that more consumer information will increase public pressure on colleges and universities to strive for quality. In South Carolina, the Commission on Higher Education also publishes on its website the results of each institution's performance report. The Washington and Missouri SHEEOs collect data and information from colleges and universities and publish a series of reports on institutional, sector, or system performance. And as Florida continues moving in the direction of performance-based accountability, more results from tests, as well as institutional measures of efficiency and productivity, will be available.

Periodic evaluation

One key to effective policymaking is timely examination of the program's structure, its critical elements, and the relevance and appropriateness of its requirements. The states in this study that have had assessment policies for many years have worked to refine and adjust them in order to make the policies both more useful and more effective. Missouri, which initially adopted Funding for Results in 1994, revisits its indicators annually and has made some significant additions and deletions. South Carolina, which adopted its performance funding system in 1996, has been engaged in a multi-year study by its legislature to examine the effectiveness of its performance funding policy and determine what should be changed about it. The state's previous inquiries into its assessment policy led to more detailed institutional performance measures. In Florida, which has engaged in some type of formal state policy for assessment since 1982, the State Board and a legislative policy office have performed annual and biennial reviews of accountability in the state and have made recommendations. These concern primarily improvement in individual assessment programs, as in how to make the Bright Futures program more effective, that the state should make better use of the data it collects, and that it must introduce more cohesion into the broad testing program currently in place. The policy in New York is still undergoing implementation and Washington is still expanding its assessment policy.

Leveraging

Money matters in generating active participation and progress in state assessment policies. States vary in the manner that they leverage state funds to achieve objectives. Some make the link explicit between performance/ satisfaction of state goals and appropriations, while others do not. New York has not made the connection between results and funding at all and does not have a performance-based policy. South Carolina is on the extreme opposite end of the spectrum because of its attempt, at least in theory, to award 100% of state appropriations based upon how the colleges and universities perform. However, other factors have come into play make the true amount more in line with other states at less than 5%. Missouri is a prime example of a state that has accomplished much with a small amount of seed money--its performance-based system has never

involved more than 5% of institutional funds, and its system is very effective. Washington uses funding to reward colleges and universities for developing plans and participating in assessment; a portion of these budget allocations are granted to colleges and universities whose plans meet state goals and requirements, while another portion is also granted cover the costs of implementation. Florida has historically made a loose connection between results and appropriations and budgets. Funding in Florida is used as an inducement and as a basis for performance budgeting, rather than performance-based funding.

Institutional assessment

One goal of state level assessment policies is to persuade the colleges and universities to invest in self-examination methods for their own institutional improvement. State policies also seek to make assessment part of the campus culture. Missouri has succeeded in getting its colleges and universities to accept assessment because it has provided resources and gained the active participation of the faculty on each campus. Washington has achieved variable levels of involvement from its colleges and universities, which is evident by its different levels of quality and participation. In general, two-year colleges and universities have been more willing to engage in assessment activity, while four-year schools have resisted and taken considerably longer to develop their methods. South Carolina has tried to make its performance-based program more meaningful by allowing the colleges and universities to select from a menu of indicators and the targets for success.

Despite nearly two decades of having a state assessment policy, Florida has trouble achieving a culture of assessment in its colleges and universities because the colleges and universities have different perspectives depending upon how they are affected. For example, the University of Florida at Gainesville found the CLAST to be an inappropriate measure of its success because most of its students didn't need to take it, whereas Miami-Dade found that the test helped reveal its favorable results in preparing undergraduates for careers and upper-division undergraduate education. Also in Florida several colleges and universities see assessment as something they already do, whereas accountability to them is a concern of the state and something that they engage in simply satisfy the state. Program review is done internally by the department for improvement and to demonstrate learning, while programs are evaluated externally by the accrediting body for quality. Institutions are involved, but don't necessarily see the link between accountability and assessment.

Leadership and Management

The roles played by the three actors, state legislature (sometimes the Governor, also), SHEEOs and representatives from the colleges and universities, have important effect upon policy formation and implementation. Accreditation associations provide more consistent leadership on assessment. These relationships will be further explored in the next section.. The state higher executive agencies play several roles and perform several functions in the process. One important role is as the *originator of the policy or the mechanism for gaining approval*. The Board of Regents in New York and the CHE in South Carolina have assumed these roles. They first brought attention to the quality of colleges and universities in their state and have worked to develop the policies. These two agencies also perform another role and that is *collector and distributor of information*. The New York Board of Regents collects information from colleges and universities and distributes it to the public and to policymakers. The CHE in South Carolina is required by two legislative acts to collect data and information and submit reports to the legislature and the Governor. SHEEOs are also

instrumental in developing *consensus and navigating* between legislature and colleges and universities. In Missouri, for example, the SHEEO develops assessment plans with colleges and universities behind closed doors and then represents the higher education community to the legislature as unified voice. It acts as a buffer between the players, building support for legislative initiatives while also preventing the legislature from having unrealistic expectations.

In South Carolina and Missouri, the SHEEOs were granted considerable power by the legislature to develop and monitor institutional compliance with the policy. In Missouri, the process of policy development allowed the CBHE to forge closer ties with its colleges and universities, and also play the role of advocate for the colleges and universities to the legislature. Two-year colleges in Washington also formed closer ties with the HECB.

The legislature obviously plays a central role in every state. The first and most important is as the *originator and monitor of policy*. The South Carolina legislature passed three acts over a period of seven years that slowly brought assessment and institutional accountability into prominence in the state. It also receives annual reports from the CHE so it also functions as a monitor. The legislature also *authorizes the SHEEO* to work on its behalf, collecting and compiling information, and making judgments. Such was the case in South Carolina. In Washington, republicans in the legislature were the driving force for assessment through its accountability movement. Finally, the legislature serves as a *partner for assessment development*, as it works with the SHEEO to modify and adjust policies to fit institutional and state needs. Such is the case in Missouri and in Florida, where legislators have been heavily involved, but also work with the SHEEO around the direction and scope of the policies.

Institutional representatives also have important leadership and management roles to play. Presidents, usually in forming a group, work collectively to shape discussion on assessment and influence the development of policy within their state. Washington is an example of college and university officials having great effects, as they were influential in setting the original parameters for performance. The best example of this is the MAC in Missouri, the group of assessment directors that is convened to share information, and now act in an unofficial capacity to promote assessment and act as buffer between colleges and universities and the CBHE.

All the case studies point to fact that for policy success to occur, a state needs strong leadership from those in government and those working in the higher education community. The SHEEO and institutional representatives need to communicate and agree on the premises for a policy as well as the way in which colleges and universities can become invested. Also, involvement of colleges and universities with other stakeholders, such as business leaders, helps to change the culture as was seen in Missouri. The SHEEO can also advance the policy by convincing the legislature to limit number of participants in development and to keep the accountability process simple.

Policy Outcomes

Colleges and universities seem to have three general reactions to state assessment policies: resistance, compliance, and cooperation. The determining factor in the reaction that colleges and universities have flows not just from the design and expectations of a policy, but the process by which it was formed, the manner in which it is implemented, and the effects it has upon the higher education system and each individual campus.

Institutional Resistance

There are many reasons colleges and universities resist, including many of the factors that prompt state agencies to develop assessment policies in the first place, such as the need to provide concrete evidence of quality and/or performance. But the primary reasons are related to the policy process and the relationships between the prominent actors in the development of the policy. Colleges and universities offer resistance when the policies seem to have disparate effects, such as in Florida when the state considered having passing scores for scholarship tests bracketed by sector, or in South Carolina when some of the colleges and universities felt the performance funding system would be unfair because it didn't take into consideration role and mission distinctions among the colleges and universities. Thus, some would be judged on criteria that did not reflect their academic activity, student body, or mission. Washington's four-year colleges and universities colleges and universities resisted much more than its two-year colleges because they didn't want state level intervention. Colleges and universities also resist when the policies seem to place burdensome requirements upon them, such as extensive data collection that taxes their ability to collect their own data. This problem becomes aggravated when the data in the two streams focuses on different or unrelated institutional elements.

Institutional Compliance

Out of respect and the obligation to adhere to the authority and leadership of policymakers, colleges and universities generally comply with the state assessment policies. Colleges and universities appear more compliant with policies, however, when funding is attached either as an inducement or as a reward. When funding is not attached, colleges and universities perform their required functions, gather the necessary data, and make the needed reports, but they continue to challenge the legislature or SHEEO on the policy, its procedures, and its method of implementation. Florida State officials, for example, expressed frustration with a system that changes frequently and is dependent upon the prevailing priorities of those in the legislature, and that also forces the collection of data that are not useful for managerial decision making. MAC officials in Missouri indicated that their colleges and universities comply with Funding for Results but that they would like to receive credit for data and results that more accurately reflect what happens in their departments.

Institutional researchers we contacted in Florida from state colleges and universities also expressed concerns about unintended consequences of the state's assessment policies, calling them "negative improvement." This is the result of having incentives that operate with an effect opposite the institution's purposes, indirectly rewarding colleges and universities for accomplishments that might be undesirable, such as rejecting minority applicants to raise an incoming cohort's academic profile. Similar concerns have been raised in South Carolina, again fueling discussions about the importance of differentiating by institutional types. Another problem is having a policy that seems to place an excessive burden upon colleges and universities to collect, analyze, and report data. Having to expend substantial resources for assessment sometimes lead to negative reactions from colleges and universities, especially if the policy was perceived to be forced upon them by external sources with little input from the institutions. Colleges and universities in South Carolina objected to being initially judged by the same standards and targets and have worked to build more institutional flexibility into the system. Also, it is not uncommon for the costs of data collection to come out of existing budgets, although Washington allocated funds specifically for assessment.

Institutional Cooperation

Colleges and universities appear to become cooperative when they perceive that the state is viewing them as a partner in the development of the assessment policy and will help them manage their campuses. Having SHEEOs design a policy to address institutional needs for improvement and management is a factor in gaining campus faculty and administrator support. Missouri succeeded at this because the CBHE respected institutional autonomy and consulted colleges and universities during the policy process. In Washington, two-year colleges became actively engaged because they saw the opportunity for gain through the process, and universities in South Carolina became more cooperative once their concerns about mission differentiation were addressed.

Beyond the financial inducements, another incentive for colleges and universities to become more politically involved is that they perceive that policymakers will most likely address their concerns if they engage the process. Also, the initial response of colleges and universities to a directive by the SHEEO or state government can be critical in determining how the final policy is constructed. Washington and South Carolina are two states in which institutional responses have directly influenced the policies that they now operate. The views that the legislature had of two- and four-year colleges and universities in Washington is illustrative of this point. As the two-year colleges became more engaged, the four-year colleges and universities put up a front to policymakers and had more difficulty in resolving differences later. The Coordinating Board perceived that four-year colleges and universities were trying to set targets at easily attainable levels, while the colleges and universities viewed assessment as state intervention. Since then the Board has worked to address institutional needs fully and obtain more cooperation from these colleges and universities. In South Carolina, the issue was much more than poor lobbying. Also, legislators in South Carolina perceived colleges and universities as acting in bad faith to construct the performance funding criteria because the targets many submitted were soft or easily attainable. This made the policy more extensive than it might have been otherwise.

Finally, trust is important in reform. If the legislature does not trust the higher education community to be objective, as in Florida, or if universities try to circumvent legislative wishes, as in Washington, or if they are generally uncooperative (South Carolina), then the climate for policymaking becomes contentious. Conversely, institutional policy actors have to feel as though policymakers are genuinely interested in improving higher education and not just imposing burdensome requirements for political purposes. Missouri officials indicated how legislators become more involved when they receive complaints from constituents about particular colleges and universities. Also, the current educational system in Florida is undergoing tremendous changes and colleges and universities are working hard to keep up with requirements, but higher education leaders are worried that it could all be for naught when a different governor or legislature institutes a new system or returns the state to its previous system. Almost all of these states underwent significant change when political power shifted from one party to another. It is likely that future shifts would produce new requirements--higher education leaders would prefer that priorities for higher education remain consistent over time as political power shifts parties.

Conditions Shaping Policy Outcomes

Institutional cooperation and representation during the development and implementation processes are important. Colleges and universities appear to realize that the new climate for accountability and results is here to stay and consequently, they are becoming more engaged with policymakers in addressing their concerns. Several cases demonstrate that the terms of

accountability, quality, and institutional improvement can have many different meanings to those involved in the policy process, so colleges and universities benefit from being involved to ensuring their needs are addressed. Universities in Washington were left out of the loop when they tried to circumvent policymakers' wishes, and resistance in South Carolina led to a more exacting system that left institutions unhappy.

Public opinion has become an important driver of political will, and with the public expecting results and value from public colleges and universities, policymakers are eager to reform higher education to satisfy these demands. South Carolina, Missouri, and Florida are examples of states that had ample political and public will to reform higher education.

The centralization of a policy makes a difference in how policies are monitored and maintained. The institution-centered approach creates wide variability in policies, making it hard to sustain the energy required for continuation and development, and it takes longer to build a culture for assessment. The states that followed this approach, New York, Washington, and to some extent Florida, have found it difficult to construct coherent models for assessment. Such policies must be reevaluated and adjusted to have them accomplish the goals originally established. Successful policies should focus more on institutional improvement processes rather than just accountability for particular outcomes. Developing policies useful to colleges and universities can produce the quality policymakers seek as well as help colleges and universities to accomplish state goals and targets of accountability. Taking institutional concerns into account allows the state to avoid having concerns over negative improvement and unintended consequences that standardized and uninformed policies can have.

CHAPTER FOUR

Conclusions

Focusing upon historical and political context helps to explain the construct and operation of state assessment policies. This research on the assessment policies and practices of the five states and three regional accreditation associations generated substantial evidence of clear distinctions in the policies of the states and how the political context of the states illuminate the shape and tone of these policies and in turn, the standards established by the regional accreditation associations.

By describing the approaches that these five states and three regional accreditation associations have taken, the case studies demonstrate a clear emphasis at these two levels upon improving teaching and learning in higher education. This emphasis at the state and regional accreditation levels has elevated the level of measurement, assessment and reporting by colleges and universities of their performance. It is also apparent that the emphasis by the states and regional accreditation associations has led to improvements in the clearer definitions of key indicators. Less clear is the extent to which the heightened emphasis and improved assessment practices over the past two decades has yielded measurable improvement in the quality of teaching and learning that takes place in colleges and universities.

The following are conclusions reached from our analyses of the connections between the policy contexts, processes and outcomes. These observations address the questions posed in the introductory chapter as part of the conceptual framework, namely the following:

- What political circumstances in the state led to the adoption of the policy?
- What entities and factors influenced the policy content?
- What was the quality of the relationships between colleges and universities and the state government at the time the assessment policy was developed?
- What were the primary objectives of a state's assessment policy?
- What priorities were identified in the policy?
- What were the institutional, political, and financial results of this policy?
- How were the institutional, political, and financial results different from those that were expected?
- How did the interactions among state government officials, the SHEEO agencies, and institutional representatives contribute to these outcomes?
- What policy design and structural elements were significant in producing the outcomes?
- What contextual factors in the political and social climate for assessment are relevant?
- What explanations are possible for any disjuncture between objectives and outcomes?

State Policies

The contextual factor of most importance in the development of state assessment policy is the formal authority and influence that a SHEEO or state legislature has in relation to the colleges and universities; however, the autonomy of the colleges and universities is affected by the assessment policies. Although not a formal exchange, institutions express an expectation that in return for acceding to state demands for assessment, their compliance will result in some flexibility to design the methods for conducting assessment. Failing that, they desire to have any new policy produce a means by which to address institutional needs.

New York

The state of New York has historically maintained a laissez-faire approach to regulating its colleges and universities. The Board of Regents and the State Department of Education have operated under a system of setting expectations for colleges and universities through state resolutions and regulations from the system administration level while also allowing colleges and universities to find ways to comply. More centralized forms of policy control, such as report cards and performance indicators, have been less welcome and more short-lived in the state than the carefully studied and planned change through the Task Force on Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness. This effort has been far more successful because of the willingness of policymakers at the state and system administration level to study institutional needs, and that policymakers viewed assessment as a means to an end, rather than an end in itself. The goal was to develop a system that produced institutional improvement and increased the quality of higher education. Furthermore, attention was given to institutional missions and types as well as improving student learning. Addressing institutional concerns has been instrumental in moving the development process along.

Key elements in New York include developing a vision of assessment for the entire state, and then determining the role of institutions in collecting and reporting information in service to those goals. The task force had four simple recommendations that nonetheless covered a broad range of institutional activities concerning assessment. The State Department of Education has provided consistent leadership and its task forces have outlined a framework for assessment in the state. Moreover, the Department is working to forge closer relations with institutions and the appropriate accrediting bodies as a means of assuring more consistency in accreditation standards and assessment policy requirements. This cooperation between the institutions and the state, as well as the state's willingness to let institutions find ways to make assessment part of their culture and regular activities have been the primary factors related to the success of the policy this far.

South Carolina

South Carolina has a policy that has developed over a period of about 14 years. State intervention was the key at the beginning and remains so today. The legislature and the SHEEO responded to concerns about institutional performance, quality, and relative prestige and mandated increasing levels of institutional accountability through a series of four laws. The real battle for the direction of assessment in this state has come since 1996 with the institution of the most extensive performance funding system in the nation. Colleges and universities have offered some resistance to the development of the system, with universities being particularly non-cooperative in the development of the system, as they lacked the political savvy to have their concerns addressed as effectively as their two-year counterparts. This lack of good faith caused some animosity, which resulted in having a system much more strict and punitive than it otherwise might have been.

Institutions are still resistant to the idea of being judged in this manner, as they feel it fails to capture the complexity and nuance inherent in higher education, and they have been working with state officials to make the system more reflective of the diversity of institutions in the state. Also, the SHEEO has not fulfilled the intent of the legislature to make a system based fully on assessment. A legislative report found that only 3% of institutional funds were subject to performance, although the SHEEO responds that this is because most institutions score very highly on their measures.

There will most likely be some changes in the law because of the difficulty in tying funding fully to performance, as well as in trying to reflect the complexity of institutions under the system. In an effort to make the system more accurate, the latest version of the indicators is simpler, has more aspects unique to individual institutions, and has less institutional reporting. It appears that policymakers have acknowledged that institutions do have valid concerns about the system as originally implemented, and that institutions and state officials have been able to come to terms on a more accurate and realistic system.

Washington

Washington has a policy that was conceived through a process of master planning and, consequently, was meant to facilitate the coordination and improvement of higher education statewide. Assessment was designed to be a means of accomplishing two related goals of improving higher education and providing information to policymakers about quality and performance. There was a political push for concrete action as a result of the 1994 elections, a push that accelerated the state's realization of the plans begun in 1989. The implementation of the outcomes assessment policy began in the two-year sector and was later expanded to four-year institutions, although not without some difficulty. Four-year institutions initially submitted soft targets for performance, which raised the ire of the legislature. Since then, the SHEEO has acted in a manner to lessen the friction between these two entities.

Washington also has a decentralized policy, although it is implementing it using a performance-based system rather than a collection and reporting system, as in New York. Still, there are no links between performance and funding. Because of the resistance of institutions and the desire to make assessment improvement focused rather than state-priority focused, the state only provides broad guidelines for assessment and targets for institutions in a few areas. Institutions are given the flexibility to devise their own methods for demonstrating performance in these areas.

Trust and credibility has been slowly developed in Washington, as institutional resistance and legislative enthusiasm were tempered in favor of a system designed to address institutional concerns and foster improvement in critical areas of higher education. Assessment remains focused at the institutional level, but is done in service of the broader state goals. Political influence and activity at the initial stages was critical to the policy initially implemented, but the process of evaluation and adjustment has enabled the policy actors to address shortcomings and focus the policy on state goals and institutional needs. Continued involvement by the SHEEO on behalf of institutions has been an important element of removing the distrust and bringing leadership to the policy process.

Missouri

Missouri is a state with a long history of assessment and a record of evaluating its methods to more effectively achieve state goals. Institutional initiative was important here, although the state government has been considerably involved for more than 15 years now and now directs much of what occurs. The state has three levels of assessment activity, 1) a performance funding system focused on student learning, and institutional effectiveness, and accountability, 2) an evaluation of the extent to which institutions fulfill their missions, and 3) measurement of institutional attainment of 24 statewide goals for higher education. The SHEEO also asks institutions to operate so as to achieve the three broad goals of access, quality, and efficiency; these incorporate the other state goals.

The state has had success with its assessment policy because institutional behavior is moving towards a culture of assessment. Administrators and faculty are increasingly working with the SHEEO to find new ways to comply with the legislative directives. The SHEEO has also worked on the behalf of institutions to help create a more differentiated policy that recognizes institutional differences, is not focused on competition among institutions, and that uses data for decision making.

Key elements contributing to this success are the longevity of the state's policy and the political willingness to sustain the commitment to assessment over time. The governor, legislature, and SHEEO are committed to making the policy successful, and remain engaged with institutional actors to make it so. Also, the fact that assessment grew out of institutional actions is important, as state officials want to make assessment something institutions choose to do for their own academic management purposes rather than as a result of state intervention. Finally, having a clear and focused purpose for the policy and subsequent implementation has been critical to maintaining the support of institutions.

Florida

Assessment in Florida has to be understood in the context of the state's overall design for education; higher education success with assessment is the culmination of a successful system from elementary to postsecondary education and beyond. Higher education assessment in particular grew out of a series of actions by the state legislature over more than 20 years to obtain more data from institutions about particular areas of their performance. Unfortunately, this process has not occurred under a coherent policy-- rather assessment in Florida has grown by accretion, with policy elements being added as new stakeholder needs and requests for data arise.

The state has attempted to link performance--mostly defined as productivity and efficiency--to funding, first as an incentive, but now is moving towards a rewards system. For more than 20 years, the legislature has tried to make institutions more accountable and better stewards of public funds. The goal is to foster improvement while increasing the flow of data to the legislature; reports on accountability and performance have been generated for more than 15 years.

The policy in Florida is focused on generating assessment data at the institutional, program, and student levels. It is this focus on data that underpins all of what occurs in the state. Data is becoming available in more areas and the goal going forward is to find new ways of using it for improvement and decision making. The overarching vision for higher education assessment, if one can be said to exist, dovetails with the goals the state has for K-20 education: use the data to determine how all levels of education influence one another, and work towards improvement. Policymakers in the state remain focused on this as the goal for education policy.

Regional Accreditation Association Standards

Understanding the roles and influence of the regional associations on the relationships among the levels of assessment in higher education has been an important focus of this study. Our framework allows us to consider the interactions between different levels as a factor in the evolution of assessment policies and practices. Viewing assessment development as an interactive process will facilitate understanding regarding the roles of the state-level entities and individual institutions in shaping policy and how these influence and are influenced by accreditation criteria and standards.

In some instances, the influence of one level on another is clear and direct: if the Middle States Association requires its members to provide evidence of their assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness, then each MSACS-accredited institution will have such an assessment system. In the case of Middle States, there is a tradition of emphasis on institutional assessment for accreditation purposes, and thus MSACS policy and philosophy are developed in greater detail. With the Northwest Association, there has been less focus on assessment, and thus less to report. However, North Central offers another example of strong influence. Its criteria discuss the demonstration of student achievement as the definition of institutional effectiveness. And its Levels of Implementation guidelines provide institutions with a benchmark for measuring their own activity. Examination of these levels and the institutional activity is a critical component of site visits and team reports. NCA also grants institutions a great deal of flexibility in complying with its criteria, so institutions in Missouri cite the influence of the association, but not in a negative or cumbersome manner.

Within the Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges and the State of New York, that relationship is strong. The strength of the relationship is a function of two factors: (1) the ongoing commitment by the Middle States Association to the use of assessment in the accrediting process; and (2) the interests of the state in developing policies that complemented, and did not duplicate, the accreditation requirements. Likewise, if a state legislature requires that all public institutions within a state will report their progress on meeting a variety of performance indicators (including but not limited to student learning outcomes), and then institutions will be compelled to demonstrate their compliance with state law.

In other cases, like the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges and the State of Washington, the relationship is not as strong. The relative weakness of this relationship is partially the result of that association and its member states taking a less explicit stance on assessment, and the concurrent protection of institutional autonomy from excessive accrediting association regulation. The institutions in the state of Washington do not seem to be heavily influenced, if at all, by the actions and stances of this body, whereas this was not the case in MSACS. This is not to say that Middle States does not respect the autonomy of its member institutions; in fact, the association makes a clear point of giving institutions great flexibility in the use of assessment to meet accrediting requirements. However, some regional associations and their members have negotiated greater institutional autonomy than others.

Occasionally, the relationships become murkier between other levels. What is the influence of state mandates on the behavior of individual faculty? According to a recent report from the Rockefeller Institute of Government at the State University of New York, surveys have found that “many lower-level administrators, and most faculty members, have little awareness of performance-based financing systems and of how their own institutions are being measured.”⁵⁵ Reversing the dynamic, what is the influence of individual faculty on their departments and colleges? Do innovative individual faculty members develop new assessment procedures that are embraced by their colleagues and upper-level administrators? These relationships are subtler and more difficult to track at the individual level.

The individual state case studies reveal various levels of influence on the part of accrediting bodies within the states they cover. The state of Florida, for example, cited the influence of SACS criteria in designing and implementing its program review process. The concept of institutional

⁵⁵ Linking State Resources to Campus Results: From Fad to Trend—the Fifth Annual Report. Joseph C. Burke and Henrik Minassians, 2001.

effectiveness resonates with the institutions there and they work hard at demonstrating it. However, the legislature and Board of Education are skeptical about adopting and extending that model, which they consider peer review, as one for evaluating entire institutions objectively for the purposes of assessing student outcomes. The model does, however, serve as a jumping off point.

Florida and New York are also examples of states that have attempted to work with their accrediting associations in an effort to reduce the number of reports that institutions must compile. Florida has tried to make program review visits and accreditation site visits overlap and serve both purposes. The Regents in New York are attempting to allow institutions to develop one institutional effectiveness plan that would satisfy all interested parties. These are indications that the process and criteria for accreditation are useful for evaluating institutional quality and should be considered valuable information by policymakers.

These case studies reveal that regional accreditation associations have some indirect influence in states in which they form close working relationships with institutions. The influence is indirect because institutions are seeking to comply primarily with state directives, because the legislative/board control over funding and other resources is of prime importance. The assessment activity at the institutional level will most closely resemble, at a minimum that required by those entities exercising the most direct control over institutions. Regional accreditation association influence is evident in areas not typically affected by state intervention, such as program review and the design of elements of an institutional policy that go beyond state requirements. Such assessment practices are focused on improvement of academic processes that the institutions deem important to their own operational success.

These cases have provided evidence that institutional administrators and faculty may be more attuned to the criteria and standards for accreditation when they become interested in improvement or broadly involved in assessment, but that there is not necessarily a relationship between the practices involved in quality improvement for accreditation purposes and the gathering of assessment information for state accountability purposes. Institutions may in fact view accountability and accreditation as two unrelated activities that require them to gather information and produce reports, some of which may contain information that overlaps, but which still serves two distinct purposes. Some states, like New York, Missouri, and Florida are examining ways to reduce this duplication of effort, but admit there is much work to be done here.

Thus, the influence of the regional accreditation associations seems to skip over the state level and proceed to the institutions, and the extent to which the criteria and standards affect institutional activity is dependent upon how engaged the institution is with assessment as a means of improvement.

Discussion

Assessment policies that are successful in achieving their objectives and bringing about positive changes in higher education in the state are comprised of certain characteristics. This section attempts to highlight these and suggest how they contribute to favorable outcomes.

Successful policies seem to have a clear and focused purpose. Having a precisely defined vision for the form assessment will take and the purposes it will serve at all levels of higher education assists all stages of the policy development process. Also, policymakers and institutions will benefit from knowing the rationale for establishing a policy and its accompanying requirements, and they will be more apt to work towards a process that has definite goals. Missouri is the best

example of this, as virtually all institutions possess the same understanding of the goals for the state's policy and what the priorities for higher education are. Florida is an example of a state that has proceeded for nearly 20 years without a clearly defined policy and as a result, has struggled to bring its disparate assessment activities under a coherent vision of state needs and requirements.

Related to the clear purpose is a dedicated and focused leadership committed to the idea of developing and implementing a policy that accomplishes state objectives and serves institutions as well. A committed leadership keeps the policy actors on task when the process becomes difficult or murky, and also provides some stability over time as legislators, assessment directors, and government personnel change. The leadership is also critical when it comes time to revisit the policy and determine its effectiveness. The Missouri Assessment Consortium provides an innovative and critical form of leadership in its state as it facilitates communications between policy actors, while the coordinating board in the state has also been very proactive in promoting assessment. The board in Washington has also been active as a mediator between the institutions and the legislature.

Successful policies appear to be developed in consultation with the institutions. One critical component of a successful policy may be to focus it on outcomes associated with the needs and processes of colleges and universities. The end goal of assessment policies is the betterment of institutions and all of higher education. Emphasizing outcomes without attending to internal processes only serves to frustrate administrators and irritate academic managers, which is not a formula for success. The best examples of this are the disagreements over differentiating assessment standards and indicators by institutional type or mission. Institutions in South Carolina, Florida, and Missouri challenged their state's policy for comparing them using the same standards and expectations.

A policy that provides data that are meaningful and useful to academic managers and faculty will find greater acceptance than one that demands information without regard as to how it improves internal institutional processes. In addition to providing public information and changing institutional behavior, a purpose for accountability through assessment is the improvement of colleges and universities. Consulting institutions affords them the opportunity to declare what forms of data are most critical to their operations. New York and Washington are allowing more institutional input since their policies are decentralized and permit specific assessment methods to be defined at the institutional level. The other three states in our study have learned over time to take the institutional perspective into account when making policy design decisions. An assessment policy will benefit from having administrators and faculty to buy in and take ownership of the process. This allows assessment to become incorporated into institutional management for ongoing operations.

Resistance is certain when policies are initially introduced and, depending on how the policy and development process are carried out, throughout the process. State policymakers can benefit from having a plan for responding to resistance. The important consideration here is how to manage the resistance so that all sides come to understand one another more clearly. Keeping the lines of communication open amongst all policy actors can help them overcome the uncertainty and difficulty of the situation. Washington and South Carolina are two states in which trust and credibility eroded as their performance funding system were developed when institutions did not act in good faith when responding to state requests. It has taken time and active participation from the coordinating boards in these states to work through these difficulties so that the policies could be successfully implemented. Addressing institutional concerns was key to the process.

In a related matter, policymakers may benefit from taking time to understand the complexity of higher education and its differences from, as well as similarities to K-12 education. Given the diverse missions, student bodies, and structures of higher education institutions with a given state, it is unlikely for any one policy tool to accurately reflect the institutional differences that cause outcomes to vary in different contexts. Applying standardized criteria, performance targets, or evaluation criteria to all institutions will be unfair to some institutions and overly generous to others. South Carolina officials have realized this and have set unique performance targets for each institution that are in line with their prior performance. New York and Washington are also acknowledging institutional diversity by allowing institutions to determine their own methods for complying with state priorities and goals.

Successful policies are formed out of fruitful statewide discussions. The process of forming the assessment policy could be as important as the policy itself. Bringing institutional representatives, policymakers, and business and civic leaders together to flesh out the priorities for higher education and the purposes for assessment can be quite beneficial even if no policy evolves from the discussions. Future policy actors emerge with a clearer understanding of the perspectives, realities, and needs of the others and also leave with a better grasp on how assessment could operate at the state level. Missouri officials proclaimed that their process was invaluable and were grateful that multiple stakeholder groups were involved in shaping their policy. South Carolina is another state that had discussions with leaders within and outside higher education.

While it is useful for policymakers to receive input from many differing stakeholders, their involvement in the formal policy development process should be limited. Trying to involve too many individuals and groups may lead to an unfocused policy. As an example, community colleges in Florida have seven different reporting requirements because of seven distinct entities that require them to submit data. These provisions were not all instituted at the same time but have accumulated as new requirements for data emerged. Thus, there is duplication of effort in the policy. Missouri is an example of a state that managed to incorporate input from different sectors across the state as policies options were considered, but became efficient about identifying who would be involved in making final decisions.

Policymakers might also benefit from embracing simplicity over complexity when designing policies. States may be better off attempting to “do more with less” in terms of indicators and outcomes. Having a system with 20, 30, 50, or more indicators may become cumbersome and expensive to monitor, and it is not apparent that they lead to improvement. South Carolina executives have decided to focus on fewer indicators and implement fewer reporting requirements going forward. Missouri officials decided to scale down their system down to 10 indicators because of the difficulty in managing the data, and Washington and Florida have started their systems with a small number of priorities on which to gather data. States are typically interested in measures of productivity and efficiency, and simply focusing on a few of these could lead to other efficiencies. Also, extensive systems tend to bog down because institutions spend a great deal of time and energy complying with the requirements.

Just as the purposes must not be too expansive, so should the structures and process also be limited. Trying to accomplish too much will yield a policy that in fact achieves very little. Directed change is a slow process and given the complexity of higher education at the institutional and state levels, the coordination required to produce effective policy will only allow personnel at all levels to focus meaningfully on a narrow set of goals and processes at any given time. Florida has been working under a set of policies that sometimes combine to leave institutions unclear about where to direct their energies, and leave policymakers frustrated at the slow pace of change.

Finally, implementing and maintaining a successful assessment policy eventually becomes an ongoing process. As new policies are added, old ones need to be evaluated. Revisiting policies periodically ensures that they are relevant to institutions and serving state needs. Adding new directives without revisiting old ones can lead to a policy of accretion, whereby overlapping and duplicative policies can be enacted, thereby creating more of a burden on institutions.

Implications

This research has shown that states attempt to achieve a great number of objectives with their assessment policies. Our study has been both descriptive and analytical in nature, focusing on both processes and emergent themes. Going forward, there are many inferences to be drawn from having a greater understanding about the formation and development of assessment policy at the state government and regional accreditation association levels. These implications can be organized around a series of important policy topics that states will have to address as they consider adopting or revising their assessment policies.

Funding

State policymakers have demonstrated a significant degree of interest in attaching appropriations to performance but are experiencing many challenges in identifying the ideal approaches. Included among the challenges are few consistently reliable methods by which to measure the educational activity, productivity, and efficiency of higher education, and even less direct relationships between the outcomes produced at one institution the meaning of that data in the context of another. Even with these challenges there are many states that are carrying out successful performance funding policies and are learning and improving with experience. South Carolina has recently tweaked its policy to include fewer indicators, have more that are unique to individual institutions, and to have fewer reporting requirements. And Missouri has scaled down its FFR program to make it simpler and more effective.

Policymakers in states in this study are also signaling a possible trend by the combining of K-12 and postsecondary sectors into one for the purposes of making public policy decisions. Having a K-20 structure or a policy process that conceives as all of education as a single entity could mean greater difficulty for higher education in attracting funding. This trend of merging sectors was evident in New York and Florida in this study.

Scope and Effectiveness

States are trying to achieve too much while also being unclear about their specific interests. Many state policies begin with great ambitions, cast their nets too broadly, and attempt too many objectives. A great amount of state resources are being devoted to assessment, especially when funds from the state to promote and conduct assessment, institutional resources that are redirected to fund assessment activity, and legislative appropriations to institutions that are contingent on assessment are considered. Obtaining more familiarity with the practicalities associated with meaningful assessment and having more clearly articulated expectations could help to produce more effective policies.

There is a clear dissonance between state policymakers' expectations and institutional practices regarding student assessment. States have short-term needs and conceptualizations about what is appropriate, and have established committees, task forces, and liaisons to coordinate these activities at institutions. However, in the long-term view, more cohesiveness will be needed between

what state leaders desire to have institutions accomplish, and what is both feasible and useful for institutions to direct their attention towards achieving.

Data

Clearly, the process of considering, developing, and implementing an assessment policy for higher education results in the establishment of more extensive and improved data systems. Institutions become more adept at collecting and analyzing their own performance data and become more accustomed to reporting it to the state in some manner. Information flows become more established and data becomes aggregated at levels appropriate for the respective purposes served.

There are some concerns that some of the data that is being generated is going unused for evaluation or improvement purposes. Any failure to use data for improvement and decision making purposes simply renders assessment a noteworthy public relations function and largely fails to provide significant qualitative enhancement to institutions, their management, or the performance of their academic programs.

Engagement and Coordination

Colleges and universities are becoming more attuned to political trends and are becoming more synchronized with the political structures of their states. Institutions are continually confronted with the reality of assessment and government accountability; the resulting policies can be made to reflect purposes more favorable to institutional needs when institutions respond by being proactive and engaged with the political leaders in their state. Institutions that are willing to alter their methods for management operations can present themselves as partners in good faith with the state to help achieve higher education objectives that are critical statewide.

There could be better coordination between regional accreditation associations and state government agencies when planning and implementing assessment policy. This study has shown that they are not using similar processes and criteria when designing their policies, and that the influence of the associations skips over states and goes directly to the institutions. Also, there is evidence that the two entities do not regularly communicate their preferences to one another and do not formally discuss assessment and accreditation processes to determine whether they could be combined. Improving this communication will help facilitate the influence of the different levels of assessment on one another.