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The Role of the Senior Student Affairs Officer in Creating and Sustaining a Culture of Assessment: A Case Study

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THE ROLE OF THE SENIOR STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICER IN CREATING AND SUSTAINING A CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT: A CASE STUDY

A Dissertation
Presented to
the Graduate School of
Clemson University

In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy
Educational Leadership (Higher Education)

by
Lindsey McKinney Ridgeway
May 2014

Accepted by:
Dr. Tony Cawthon, Committee Chair
Dr. Leslie Gonzales
Dr. James Satterfield
Dr. Laura Dean
ABSTRACT

The purpose of this research study was to examine the role of the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) in promoting assessment practice within the Division of Student Life at Randal University. A qualitative, single-case study research design was employed to conduct this study. The case for this investigation was the Vice President for Student Life at Randal University. Randal University is a private, liberal arts college located in the southeastern United States with an approximate enrollment of 2700 students. Data for this study was comprised of interviews, documents, and researcher notes. Fifteen Randal University employees participated in this qualitative case study. Semi-structured, in-person interviews were conducted on the university campus. Data analysis was completed through a four phase process: (a) organizing and preparing data for analysis; (b) coding of data set; (c) interrelating themes/descriptions; and (d) data interpretation (Creswell, 2009). NVivo 10 was utilized to facilitate the organization and analysis of the data.

Analysis of the data revealed that the participants perceived the SSAO as the spearhead of the assessment culture in the division. Three themes emerged from the data as the participants described how the SSAO promoted assessment practice in the division: (a) ready the organization for evolution, (b) establish a supportive organizational infrastructure, and (c) utilize assessment data to inform practice. Data analysis also revealed three behavioral characteristics of the Vice President for Student Life that supported her efforts in promoting a culture of assessment: (a) relationship builder, (b) avid learner, and (c) strategic planner. This study provided new insight regarding the strategies utilized by the SSAO in promoting the practice of assessment in student affairs
divisions. Key behavioral characteristics of the SSAO imperative to building and sustaining a culture of assessment were also identified. Implications for practice and recommendations for future research were also presented.
DEDICATION

This work is dedicated to my family. I cannot begin to put into words how much your love, support, and encouragement have meant to me throughout this process.

Ryan

“I’m gonna love you like nobody’s loved you, come rain or come shine.”

Frank Sinatra

My heart is full of gratitude for your companionship throughout this adventure. Thank you for your unwavering support, reassuring pep talks, much needed reality checks, joyful celebrations, cooked dinners, house cleanings, and of course, the endless pots of coffee. Thank you for being steadfast and confident in me throughout this process — you never once doubted my ability to be successful. But more than all of these things, thank you for loving me like nobody’s loved me, when it rains and when it shines.

Mama and Daddy

“I wiggled one paw, I saw it could. I wiggled the other, I saw it would.”

Al Perkins, The Digging-est Dog

God blessed me beyond measure when He gave me you as parents. Thank you for standing on the field beside the four-year-old t-ball player that wanted to quit, whined about being hot, and tried shamelessly to convince you that she couldn’t finish the season. You instilled in me a fire to finish what I started, fight hard to reach my goals, and never give up. Thank you for instilling in me a love for learning and for supporting the little girl that loved to play school. I am ever grateful for the guidance you gave to me as I made my way down the long and winding road to find my calling as an educator. Thank you for always reminding me to be confident in myself, to try new things, and strive to reach new heights. It seems the digging-est dog was right all along — all I had to do was wiggle one paw to see that it could and wiggle the other to see that it would.

Sissy

“There's something in these hills where the Blue Ridge yawns its greatness.”

- Joe Sherman, Something in These Hills

Thank you for being my cheerleader, best friend, and all-round best little sister ever. This work is for you, sissy — so that the educators shaping your collegiate experiences, both inside and outside of the classroom, can make them educationally purposeful and enriching. My prayer for you during your time at Clemson is that you learn and grow to your full potential. There truly is something in these hills — I can’t wait to see you roar!

Go Tigers!
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about how you serve the students of your institution. Thank you all for your quick responses, willingness to share your experiences, and for giving me the opportunity to learn from you.

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CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

Institutions of higher education are increasingly required to present evidence of student learning congruent with the educational outcomes described in their mission statements (Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996), and assessment is one process through which institutions can examine what and how well students learn during college (Culp & Dungy, 2012; Maki, 2004). Upcraft and Schuh (1996) defined assessment as “any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness” (p. 18). External pressure from accrediting agencies, governing bodies, institutional stakeholders, parents, and students for a measure of effectiveness and quality makes assessment “the most powerful force in driving the decisions of colleges and universities” (Sandeen & Barr, 2006, p. 142). As assessment is a vital and necessary practice in higher education (Bardo, 2009; Keeling, Wall, Underhile, & Dungy, 2008; Maki, 2004; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996), it is the responsibility of higher education leaders to ignite an institutional commitment to assessment and respond to the imperative call for accountability (AACU & CHEA, 2008; Keeling et al., 2006; Maki, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2006).

The student affairs profession is not exempt from this demand for accountability and is “under considerable pressure to demonstrate its importance and worth” (Upcraft, 2003, p. 558). Assessment provides a mechanism for student affairs professionals to illustrate how their programs and services contribute to the academic mission of higher
education (Culp & Dungy, 2012; Keeling et al., 2008; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Several resources have reported that student affairs divisions have been challenged to create a culture of assessment that is able to provide evidence related to student learning outcomes (Bresciani, 2006; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Schuh, 2013). As the champion of the division, the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) is responsible for establishing assessment as a divisional priority, providing the resources necessary for assessment activities, and ensuring efficient coordination of divisional assessment initiatives (Busby & Robinson, 2012; Green, Jones, & Aloi, 2008; Sandeen & Barr, 2006).

In a study exploring the conditions promoting a culture of assessment, Seagraves and Dean (2010) found that SSAOs play a vital role in “establishing the foundation for assessment practice at their institutions” (p. 314). Other scholars in the field have echoed the importance of leadership in establishing assessment practice. Maki (2004) and Sandeen and Barr (2006) charged leaders with the responsibility of setting assessment as a divisional priority and situating the assessment process within the organization. Banta, Jones, and Black (2009) stressed the important role of college administrators in articulating the essential need and critical function of a sustainable assessment process. While the literature stresses the significance of assessment practice in student affairs, the need for student affairs divisions to develop a culture of assessment, and the importance of the SSAO in promoting division-wide assessment practice, there is a need to further explore how the SSAO promotes assessment practice within the division of student affairs.
This chapter serves as an introduction to the research study. Provided in this chapter is the background of the study, the statement of the problem, the significance of the study, definitions of key terms used throughout the study, presentation of the research questions that guide the investigation, potential limitations of the study, and an overview of how the study is organized. The next section of this chapter details the statement of the problem.

**Statement of the Problem**

For decades the higher education community has been challenged to address two questions: (a) are students learning; and (b) how do colleges and universities demonstrate the value, quality, and outcomes of higher education (Keeling et al., 2008; New Leadership Alliance, 2012). The resounding answer from accrediting agencies, governing bodies, professional organizations, and institutional stakeholders resides in the practice of assessment (Banta, 2002; Bardo, 2009; Peterson & Vaughan, 2002) and building a culture of evidence (Bresciani, 2006; Culp & Dungy, 2012). In *Assessment Reconsidered: Institutional Effectiveness for Student Success*, Keeling Wall, Underhile, and Dungy (2008) described the central role assessment practice plays in higher education:

Primary to the mission and goals of every postsecondary institution is education itself - the process that students may experience as learning. Knowing how to assess the kind of learning that occurs in higher education is central to the ability of educators - both inside and outside the classroom, in the traditional academic faculty or in student affairs - to do their best work. The assessment of learning explores how effectively
engagement with the institution increased students' ability, skill, or competency in various domains as a result of various learning experiences - a curriculum, academic major, certificate program, course, specific classroom activity, student development experience (such as leadership development), or experiential learning activity (p. 4).

The acknowledgement of assessment as a vital and necessary practice is not a new or unfamiliar notion in the student affairs profession. Assessment has been a priority since the profession formally defined its purpose and role within higher education through the Student Personnel Point of View of 1937 and 1949 (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949). What has changed regarding assessment in student affairs are the external demands for accountability and the internal pressures for improvement (Banta, 2002; Keeling et al., 2008; Peterson & Vaughan, 2002). The concept of accountability in higher education has become more complex in recent years as access to postsecondary education has expanded, public investment and interest in high education has increased, collegial competition has been amplified, and accrediting standards have evolved (Bresciani, 2012; Keeling et al., 2008; Peterson & Augustine, 2000).

Student affairs divisions are under a considerable amount of pressure to demonstrate their contribution to student learning (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). The Student Learning Imperative (ACPA, 1996), Principles of Good Practice in Student Affairs (ACPA & NASPA, 1998), Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience (NASPA & ACPA, 2004), Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience (Keeling,
Assessment Reconsidered: Institutional Effectiveness for Student Success (Keeling et al., 2008) challenged the student affairs profession to embrace assessment practices for the educational benefit of today’s college students. As described by Keeling et al. (2008), there needs to be a “commitment among educators and administrators within colleges and universities to do good work, promote student success, use resources effectively, provide a sound student experience, and serve the public good” (p. 2-3).

Numerous scholars have identified the importance and vitality of a culture of assessment in student affairs and have described organizational conditions supportive of a culture of assessment (Bresciani, 2006; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Schuh, 2013; Seagraves & Dean, 2010; Suskie, 2009). More recently, the literature has stressed the importance of the SSAO in promoting a culture of assessment within the division of student affairs (Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009; Busby & Robinson, 2012; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Seagraves & Dean, 2010). While the literature has identified the SSAO as a significant contributor to building a divisional culture of assessment, there is a need to further investigate how the SSAO promotes assessment practice within the division. It is important to acknowledge that how the SSAO promotes assessment practice may vary based on the division and/or the institution, the SSAO, and the divisional and institutional policies and procedures. Given the contextual nature of both organizational culture and administrative behavior, a qualitative case study is employed for this study.

**Purpose of the Study**

Scholars have emphasized the crucial role of the SSAO in creating and sustaining a culture of assessment in the division of student affairs (Banta et al., 2009; Busby &
Robinson, 2012; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Seagraves & Dean, 2010). While the literature has highlighted the importance of the SSAO, further investigation is needed to explore the role of the SSAO in developing a divisional culture of assessment. The purpose of this research study is to examine the role of the SSAO in promoting assessment practice within the Division of Student Life at Randal University.

**Significance of the Study**

This qualitative case study is significant for numerous reasons. First, the recent literature described the importance of the SSAO in creating and sustaining a culture of assessment in student affairs. Therefore, further investigation of how the SSAO actually creates and sustains a culture of assessment is warranted. While the nature of this qualitative study does not allow for generalizations to be made for the student affairs profession at large, it will provide an in-depth description of what is believed to be a highly operative culture of assessment. Secondly, while culture and leadership are contextually bound, the results of this study have the potential to provide insight into an issue of ever-increasing importance to SSAOs within the profession.

**Definition of Terms**

This section defines the terms commonly used throughout this study. The definitions for the terms are from the higher education and student affairs literature.

1. **Assessment** is “any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness” (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 18).
2. **Culture** refers to a “system of shared values (that define what is important) and norms that define appropriate attitudes and behaviors for organizational members (how to feel and behave)” (O’Reilly & Chatman, 1996, p. 160).

3. **Culture of assessment** refers to a commitment among student affairs professionals to utilize data to demonstrate how their programs and services are effective and contribute to the institution’s ability to fulfill its mission (Culp, 2012). Culture of assessment and culture of evidence are used interchangeably throughout the course of this study.

4. **Senior student affairs officer** is the administrative leader of the division of student affairs (MacKinnon, 2004). The terms senior student affairs officer and chief student affairs officer are used interchangeably throughout this study.

5. **Student affairs** describes the administrative unit responsible for administering non-academic support services (Culp, 2012). The terms student affairs, student life, student services, division of student affairs, and division of student life are used interchangeably throughout this study.

6. **Student affairs profession** refers to the body of scholarly literature, professional knowledge, and guiding philosophy shared by professionals responsible for providing non-academic support services (Culp, 2012; Helfgot, 2005).
7. **Student affairs professional** is an individual employed within the division of student affairs at an institution of higher education and is responsible for administering non-academic support services (MacKinnon, 2004). For the purpose of this study, student affairs professional, student affairs practitioner, student life professional, student life practitioner, and student services personnel will be used interchangeably.

8. **Student learning and development** refers to the “outcomes students realize when exposed to new experiences, concepts, information, and ideas; the knowledge and understanding gleaned from interactions with higher education learning environments” (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2006, p. 364).

9. **Student services** are the programs, services, and activities provided by the division of student affairs, which includes but is not limited to, alcohol and drug education, career counseling, community involvement, health and counseling services, housing, Greek life, leadership programs, multicultural affairs, orientation, and student conduct (Culp, 2012).

This section has provided definitions for the commonly used terms throughout this study. The next section introduces the primary and secondary research questions for this case study.
Research Questions

The primary and secondary research questions for this single case study are presented in this section.

Primary Research Question

The following primary research question guided this study:

- How does the SSAO promote a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University?

Secondary Research Questions

The following secondary questions also guided the investigation:

- How does the SSAO establish commitment from divisional staff members to engage in student affairs assessment?
- How do divisional staff members describe the role of the SSAO in promoting assessment practice within the division?
- What role does institutional planning and accreditation play in the SSAO’s commitment to promote assessment practice within the division of student life?

Limitations

There are several limitations to this research study. The generalizability of the findings is limited due to the utilization of a single case study research design (Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). There is also the potential for bias in the selection of the case, participants, and documents for analysis. As noted by Creswell (2009), it is important for the researcher to outline in detail the protocol used to select the data.
sources, which is provided in Chapter Three. There is also an ethical concern regarding analysis of qualitative case study data (Merriam, 1998). As the instrument in the data collection, I filtered the data through my own sensemaking process as I collected and analyzed the data (Weick, 1995). It is important for me as the researcher to position myself within the research and acknowledge my worldview and biases, which is detailed in Chapter Three.

**Organization of the Study**

This research study is presented in five chapters. Chapter One includes the background of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, significance of the study, definition of terms, research questions, and limitations of the study. Chapter Two presents a review of the literature, which includes an overview of the history of assessment, driving forces for assessment in student affairs, culture of assessment in student affairs, professional competencies of the SSAO, and the conceptual framework for the study. Chapter Three presents the methodology for the study, which includes a review of the pilot study findings, research design, research questions, case selection, data sources, participant selection, the role of the researcher, data collection, and data analysis procedures. Chapter Four presents the findings of the study, which includes a description of the case, an introduction to participants, and emerging themes. Chapter Five presents a summary of the findings, discussion of the emergent themes, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review highlights the relevant literature surrounding the role of the senior student affairs officer (SSAO) in promoting a culture of assessment in student affairs divisions. In the first section of the review, an overview of the history of assessment in student affairs is provided. The second section of the review highlights the driving forces for assessment in student affairs. The third section of the review provides an overview of the culture of assessment in student affairs divisions. The fourth section of the review focuses on the leadership competencies of the student affairs administrator. The final section of the review provides a conceptual framework for assessment culture in student affairs.

Clemson University Libraries’ online databases were utilized to retrieve scholarly literature. Assortments of key words, both individually and in combination, were used to conduct an online search of the Academic Search Premier database, OneSearch database, and Google Scholar for articles published between 1930 and 2014. This time span was selected in order to provide a search of the literature that covered a time span long enough to review the history of assessment in student affairs. The following key words were employed during the online search: accountability, accreditation, administration, assessment, chief student affairs officer, college, competency, culture, decision-making, evaluation, evidence, higher education, institution, leader, leadership, learning, organization, quality, senior student affairs officer, student, student affairs, student learning, and university. The online searches were restricted to peer-reviewed, scholarly
publications. Utilizing the ancestry approach (Cooper 1998), bibliographies of the publications found through the online search were also used to retrieve additional articles.

**History of Assessment in Student Affairs**

Assessment has always been a part of the work of student affairs professionals. Evaluation of programs and services was emphasized as a priority in the foundational documents of the student affairs profession (ACE, 1937, 1949). As the profession was challenged to further demonstrate its contribution to student learning, student affairs professionals gradually began to embrace outcomes-based assessment (ACPA, 1996, 1998; Bresciani, 2010). Greater demands for accountability continued to perpetuate the growth of assessment in student affairs in the new millennium (Bardo, 2009; Keeling, 2006; NASPA & ACPA, 2004; U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The following section provides an overview of the historical significance of assessment practice in student affairs.

This section aims to demonstrate the importance of assessment in student affairs. The history of assessment in higher education and student affairs is extensive. For the purpose of this review, I discuss two foundational documents of the student affairs profession, *The Student Personnel Point of View* of 1937 and 1949, in order to demonstrate the importance of assessment as the profession formalized its purpose and role in higher education. I then provide an overview of the key documents advocating for assessment in student affairs from the 1980s to the present. As noted by Ewell (2002), assessment became a significant topic of policy discussion in the 1980s. The historical
publications reviewed in this section demonstrate why assessment is of critical importance to the work of student affairs professionals.

Two milestone documents of the profession, *The Student Personnel Point of View* of 1937 and 1949, provide early evidence of assessment as a priority in student affairs. The purpose of the *Student Personnel Point of View* (SPPV) of 1937 was to define and clarify personnel practices in colleges and universities. As a pivotal document in the student affairs profession, this publication acknowledged the obligation for educational institutions to “consider the student as a whole” and the need to focus on “the development of the student as a person rather than upon his intellectual training alone” (ACE, 1937, p. 3). In describing an effective educational program which adequately supports academic instruction, the authors articulated 23 expectations of the student affairs profession, five of which focused on the necessity of evaluating programs and services in order to improve their delivery. The twenty-third and final expectation challenged student personnel professionals to carry out “studies designed to evaluate and improve these functions and services” (ACE, 1937, p. 5). The authors of this seminal document further proposed the Committee on Student Personnel Work undertake a research project to explore students’ activities outside of the classroom since they had “no significant data as to the activities in which they engage” (ACE, 1937, p. 10).

This instrumental document is important to establishing assessment as a priority in student affairs for two reasons: (a) the authors acknowledge higher education’s obligation to educate the whole student, and (b) the emerging profession is challenged to develop methods for evaluating and improving student affairs programs and services.
Considered a foundational document of the student affairs profession (Nuss, 2003), the SPPV of 1937 is significant because it formally acknowledges the educational contribution of college students’ out-of-class experiences and the importance of evaluating these experiences for the betterment of the students’ education.

In 1949, the American Council on Education (ACE) released a revision of this foundational publication. The authors stressed the importance of a collaborative, holistic approach to student learning through both in- and out-of-class experiences. The authors recognized that “development is conditioned by many factors” (ACE, 1949, pg. 21) and therefore outlined fifteen objectives for a comprehensive plan of student personnel services. In regard to assessment, this publication indicated that all personnel workers were responsible for progressive program development. The authors asserted that each member of the student personnel staff “must devote a large part of his time to the formulation of new plans and to the continuous evaluation and improvement of current programs” (ACE, 1949, p. 33). The appraisal methods presented in this publication focused on the evaluation of students’ satisfaction, utilization of student personnel services, and staff performance.

Another important component of the SPPV of 1949 was the emphasis the authors placed on personnel workers being trained in research methods as part of their professional preparation. The closing section of the document emphasized the importance of utilizing evaluative methods to improve student personnel work. The authors asserted that “without such a stress upon critical and experimental self-study, student personnel
work will deteriorate into ritual observance which yields little assistance to growing students” (ACE, 1949, pg. 35).

The SPPV of 1949 is important in demonstrating assessment as a priority in student affairs because the publication acknowledged the following: (a) all personnel workers should devote time to the evaluation and improvement of student personnel programs and services, and (b) the need for student personnel workers to be trained in research methods as part of their professional training. While this document does acknowledge evaluation as part of student affairs practice, the evaluations are not focused on student learning and development through participation in student personnel programs or through interaction with student personnel workers. Both the 1937 and 1949 SPPVs demonstrate an early commitment by the student affairs profession to practice assessment (Culp, 2012). As the profession continued to develop and refine its role in higher education over the next three decades, student affairs professionals remained involved in program evaluation and research on student learning (Ewell, 2002). However, several significant publications in the 1980s set the stage for assessment to emerge as the priority it is today in both higher education and student affairs.

Assessment emerged as a significant topic of policy discussion in higher education in the 1980s (Ewell, 2008). Three national reports on higher education, Involvement in Learning (National Institute of Education, 1984), Integrity in the College Curriculum (Association of American Colleges, 1985), and Time for Results (National Governors Association, 1986) emphasized the need for assessment in higher education as a means of holding colleges and universities accountable for student learning.
Involvement in Learning (National Institute of Education, 1984) and Integrity in the College Curriculum (Association of American Colleges, 1985) asserted that “systematic evidence about what and how much students learn” (Ewell, 2008, pg. 8) is imperative to the systematic improvement of undergraduate education. These reports expressed the need for colleges and universities to convey learning outcomes for undergraduate education and develop a systematic approach for assessing what and how much students learn (Ewell, 2008).

In their report, Time for Results, the National Governors Association (1986) argued that “information about what graduating students know and can do provides the ultimate bottom line in terms of which to judge the effectiveness of public investments in higher education” (Ewell, 2008, pg. 8). As articulated in their report, the National Governors Association (1986) contended the effectiveness of an educational system is dependent upon what their graduates are capable of upon graduation. The declaration to hold colleges and universities accountable for student learning in these three reports led most states to adopt policies on student learning assessment and require public institutions to collect and report data on student achievement (Ewell, 2002; Ewell, 2008; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). By 1990, two-thirds of the states had mandated a policy to require colleges and universities to assess student learning (Ewell, Finney, & Lenth, 1990).

While these three reports jumpstarted the discussion on student learning assessments, the 1992 reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (HEA) of 1965 further sharpened higher education’s focus on assessment. In an effort to enhance the quality of
higher education in the United States, Congress amended the HEA in 1992 to require accreditors to implement more rigorous recognition procedures. The HEA also specified explicit standards related to curricula, faculty, and student support services accrediting bodies were expected to monitor (Ewell, 2008; Wolanin, 2003). Given the provision for accountability in the 1992 reauthorization of the HEA, the student affairs profession began to embrace the practice of outcomes-based assessment (Bresciani, 2010).

In the 1990s, the student affairs profession began to focus on outcomes-based assessment of student learning (Bresciani, 2010). Two publications by the student affairs profession’s professional organizations, ACPA’s (1994) *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs* and ACPA and NASPA’s (1998) joint publication *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs*, stressed the importance of assessment practice in student affairs work.

In 1996, ACPA published *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs*, which was intended to “stimulate discussion and debate on how student affairs professionals can intentionally create the conditions that enhance student learning and personal development” (ACPA, 1996, pg. 1). This publication was the result of the Student Learning Project, which was initiated by ACPA’s President Charles Schroeder in the fall of 1993. President Schroeder assembled a group of respected leaders in higher education to explore how college student learning and development could be enhanced through the work of student affairs professionals. Bringing together a myriad of experiences and scholarly research, the authors outlined five characteristics of a learning-oriented student affairs division. These five characteristics were based upon six
assumptions about higher education, student affairs, and student development: (a) a college educated person can be identified by certain competencies; (b) learning, personal development, and student development are inextricably intertwined and inseparable; (c) in-class and out-of-class experiences both on and off campus contribute to student learning and development; (d) interactions between students and their environments during college cultivate student learning and development; (e) knowledge and understanding are critical to student success and institutional improvement; and (f) student affairs professionals are educators who share the responsibility for student learning (ACPA, 1996).

Within these assumptions about higher education, student affairs, and student development, it is important to highlight the fifth assumption presented in this publication regarding the importance of knowledge and understanding to institutional improvement. The fifth assumption states, “to encourage student involvement in learning tasks, thereby improving institutional productivity, the outcomes associated with college attendance must be assessed systematically and the impact of various policies and programs on learning and personal development periodically evaluated” (ACPA, 1996, pg. 2). This profound statement made by the authors demonstrates the importance of assessment to the work of student affairs professionals and the impactful role it plays in student affairs and higher education at large.

ACPA (1996) then articulated the following five characteristics of a learning-oriented student affairs division: (a) the student affairs division mission complements the institutional mission and focuses primarily on student learning and development; (b)
resources are allocated to the processes and conditions that support student learning and development; (c) student affairs professionals must collaborate within the institution and with outside agencies to provide educationally purposeful experiences; (d) student affairs professionals should be experts on students, the college environment, and teaching and learning processes; and (e) the student affairs division should develop policies and programs based on research and institution-specific assessment. Within these five characteristics, the authors articulate why assessment is critical and important to the work of student affairs professionals.

While stressing the importance of a divisional mission congruent with the institutional mission, the authors of *The Student Learning Imperative* explain why measuring student learning is important by stating the following: “if learning is the primary measure of institutional productivity by which the quality of undergraduate education is determined, what and how much students learn must be the criteria by which the value of student affairs is judged” (ACPA, 1996, pg. 3). The authors further stress the importance of assessment in the final characteristic by challenging the profession to routinely and rigorously evaluate the contribution of student affairs programs and services to student learning and development. *The Student Learning Imperative* acknowledged legislators, governing boards, and accreditors call for accountability in higher education and challenged the student affairs profession to answer this call through outcomes-based assessment of student learning and development.

Following the challenge from *The Student Learning Imperative*, ACPA and NASPA joined forces to identify the practices that would enable the student affairs
profession to advance its commitment to student learning and development. In their joint
publication, *Principles of Good Practice for Student Affairs* (1998), the authors identified
seven principles of good practice in student affairs: (a) engages students in active
learning, (b) helps students develop coherent values and ethical standards, (c) sets and
communicates high expectations for student learning, (d) uses systematic inquiry to
improve student and institutional performance, (e) uses resources effectively to achieve
institutional missions and goals, (f) forges educational partnerships that advance student
learning, and (g) builds supportive and inclusive communities (ACPA & NASPA, 1998).
The fourth principle of good practice, uses systematic inquiry to improve student and
institutional performance, highlights the vitality of assessment practice in student affairs.

The fourth principle challenges student affairs educators to ask the question,
“What are students learning from our programs and services, and how can their learning
be enhanced?” (ACPA & NASPA, 1998, pg. 4). The authors specifically highlight the
importance of student affairs professionals’ ability to assess and analyze students’
learning in order to improve their practice, the institution, and student achievement.
Therefore, this publication further demonstrates the profession’s commitment to
assessment practice during the 1990s.

While the student affairs profession made strides towards outcomes-based
assessment in the 1990s, accrediting bodies and competition for resources further
elevated the demand for assessment in the new millennium. In 2004, the two primary
student affairs professional organizations, NASPA and ACPA, published another joint
publication, *Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience.*
NASPA and ACPA challenged student affairs and academic affairs to take a collaborative approach to student learning and development. With a focus on the whole student, the professional associations encouraged student affairs professionals to take the initiative to develop assessments of student learning in collaboration with institutional constituents. The authors posit that “assessment should be a way of life – part of the institutional culture” (NASPA & ACPA, 2004, pg. 26). The document goes on to state the usefulness of an efficient assessment plan in setting priorities, resource allocation, and enhancing student learning. This joint publication was developed by educators from both professional associations in order to put forth a unified stance on the importance of educating the whole student and to emphasize outcomes-based assessment as a priority.

Two years after the publication of Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience, ACPA & NASPA collaborated with five other professional organizations to publish Learning Reconsidered 2: A Practical Guide to Implementing a Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience. This purpose of this publication was to provide practical assistance to student affairs professionals as they infiltrated their programs and services with the ideas presented in Learning Reconsidered. The authors suggest that establishing student learning outcomes and implementing assessment processes are crucial components of accountability for supporting student learning (Keeling, 2006). The publication contends that in order to prepare student affairs professionals to effectively define and assess learning outcomes, two steps are necessary: (a) opportunities for development and training must be provided for student affairs professionals in order to increase their capacity to engage in developing and accessing
learning outcomes, and (b) “a cultural adaptation that shapes the attitudes, perspectives, and working styles necessary for effective use of outcomes and assessment techniques” (Keeling et al., 2008, pg. 55-56). Again, Keeling (2006) further emphasized the call for accountability and the need to measure student learning in higher education. This publication is important because it is the first widely accepted student affairs document to acknowledge the need for and importance of a culture of assessment within the division of student affairs.

During the same year at the federal level, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education also declared a need for accountability in higher education. In the Spellings Report, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education (2006) declared the need for colleges and universities to “become more transparent about cost, price, and student success outcomes” (p. 4). At the directive of the United States Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, the Commission on the Future of Higher Education convened to explore how to improve the American higher education system in order to meet the projected needs of the country’s workforce and shifting economy. The commission was comprised of 18 representatives from the public and private sector appointed by the Secretary of Education. With consideration given to the roles of federal, state, local, and institutional constituents, the commission examined the relevance and feasibility of the goals of higher education institutions. In their report to Secretary Spellings, the commission recommended “the creation of a robust culture of accountability and transparency throughout higher education” (U.S. Department of Education, 2006, p. 20).
The commission further recommended that institutions of higher education measure and report student learning outcomes.

It is important to acknowledge that The Spellings Report spurred a great deal of national debate in the academy. Institutions of higher education were dismayed by Secretary Spellings and the commission members’ call to standardize the outcomes of higher education. In a statement on the Spellings Commission Report, the American Association of University Professors (2006) stated:

Yet in its call the Commission ignores initiatives for assessment that accrediting bodies and campuses are already implementing across the country. It seems oblivious as to how its call for standardization could be formulated across the range of institutions and students that constitute American higher education, or the harm that such standardization would inflict on the diverse mission of our colleges and universities.

Institutions of higher education continue to debate what standardized learning outcomes in higher education would mean for academic freedom and the influence of institutional context.

The Spellings Report resulted in regional accrediting bodies sharpening their focus on student learning outcomes as a part of the accreditation process. Bardo (2009) highlighted the ways in which the accreditation process is changing in American higher education and what higher education administrators need to do in order to answer the growing demands for accountability and transparency. Bardo (2009) proposed that higher education administrators should promote an institution wide culture of evidence through
assessment and integrate accreditation as part of the institution’s strategic planning process, and develop the organizational capacity to meet the growing demand for institutional assessment data.

Two publications, *New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability* (AACU & CHEA, 2008) and *Committing to Quality: Guidelines for Assessment and Accountability in Higher Education* (New Leadership Alliance, 2012), articulated the need for institutions of higher education to set learning outcomes, assess student learning, and utilize assessment data to improve educational quality. In response to the Spellings Report, the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AACU) and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) issued a statement of principles and commitments to action entitled *New Leadership for Student Learning and Accountability*. This report was generated to acknowledge that a college degree should ensure a graduate’s ability to contribute to society. The authors argued that in order for higher education to provide a challenging and rigorous experience for students, “higher education must constantly monitor the quality of student learning and development, and use the results both to improve achievement and to demonstrate the value of our work to the public” (AACU & CHEA, 2008, pg. 1). The publication outlines principles and actions for meaningful educational accountability.

AACU and CHEA (2008) proposed that colleges and universities “should develop ambitious, specific, and clearly stated goals for student learning appropriate to its mission, resources, tradition, student body, and community setting” (pg. 2). The publication further stated that colleges and universities, as the agent primarily responsible
for achieving excellence in education, should gather evidence about student learning and utilize the information to develop strategies for educational improvement. In 2012, the New Leadership Alliance echoed these challenges in their publication, *Committing to Quality: Guidelines for Assessment and Accountability in Higher Education*. The intent of the publication’s guidelines was to provide a framework for institutions of higher education to utilize as they take responsibility for assessing and improving student learning. The authors call institutions of higher education to commit to quality by “setting clear goals for student achievement, regularly measuring performance against those goals, reporting evidence of success, and continuously working to improve results” (New Leadership Alliance, 2012, pg. 4).

Demands for accountability and transparency in the new millennium further perpetuated the need and importance of assessment in student affairs. Since the beginning of the profession, assessment has been a priority for student affairs professionals. Assessment in student affairs has evolved from simple program evaluation to in-depth outcomes-based assessment. Assessment provides a mechanism for demonstrating the profession’s contribution to student learning and support for the academic mission of higher education. In higher education today, there are numerous forces that contribute to the demand for assessment in student affairs.

**Driving Forces for Assessment in Student Affairs**

In their influential book *Assessment in Student Affairs: A Guide for Practitioners* (1996), Upcraft and Schuh described six reasons why assessment is of critical importance to the work of student affairs professionals. These driving forces for assessment highlight
the internal and external pressures encountered by student affairs divisions and illuminate the necessity and vitality of assessment practice. The following six driving forces are discussed in this section: (a) a matter of survival, (b) a matter of quality, (c) a matter of affordability, (d) a matter of strategic planning, (e) a matter of politics, and (f) a matter of policy development and decision making.

Upcraft and Schuh (1996) proposed the necessity for assessment in higher education evolved from “questions of accountability, cost, quality, access, equity, and accreditation” (p. 7). Derived from both external and internal constituents, these questions require institutions of higher learning to examine how effective they are in fulfilling their educational mission. Legislators, accreditors, policy makers and institutional administrators are seeking evidence of student learning (Maki, 2004). At the federal level, the Spellings Commission (2006) declared the need for colleges and universities to “become more transparent about cost, price, and student success outcomes” (p. 4). In their standards, regional accrediting bodies emphasize the importance of assessing student learning outcomes and institutional effectiveness (Middaugh, 2010; Tull & Kuk, 2012). At the state-level, public accountability for higher education has shifted from a focus on teaching to a focus on student learning outcomes (Ewell & Jones, 2006). Institutional administrators consider the quality and educational benefits of programs and services when constructing budgets and determining the allocation of resources. These examples exemplify the need for assessment in higher education as a means of demonstrating student learning.
Historically, the value and educational benefit of student affairs programs and services has been scrutinized in higher education (Sandeen & Barr, 2006). Therefore, student affairs divisions are also under significant pressure to demonstrate to external and internal constituents their worth, importance, and contribution to student learning. Assessment is a way for student affairs to make the “connection between what we do and how we contribute to the academic mission of our institutions and other institutional expectations” (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 12). The call for a higher level of accountability and transparency in higher education makes assessment a matter of survival for student affairs.

The growing demand for accountability in higher education has challenged student affairs divisions to demonstrate their contribution to college students’ learning and development. Assessing student learning and institutional effectiveness is a component of many of regional accreditation processes. Eaton (2007) provided an overview of the accreditation process for higher education in the United States. Accreditation was defined as “a process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement” (Eaton, 2007, p. 1). Eaton articulated that accreditation is a mechanism for assuring institutional quality to the public. In 2013, ACPA published a monograph, *Accreditation and the Role of the Student Affairs Educator*, as an effort to educate and guide student affairs professionals through the accreditation process. Within this document, Allen, Elkins, Henning, Bayless, and Gordon (2013) outlined considerations SSAOs and divisions of student affairs should consider when creating a
culture of assessment, documenting evidence-based decision-making, and preparing for an accreditation visit. While it is important to demonstrate student affairs’ contribution to student learning, there is also a need to identify the quality of these programs and services.

Questions of quality and affordability also perpetuate the need for assessment. Assessment in student affairs allows practitioners to examine if their programs and services accomplish the anticipated learning, service, or developmental outcomes. Engaging in the assessment process also allows the student affairs practitioner to define and examine the quality and affordability of their programs (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (2012) has developed standards of practice in 43 functional areas within student affairs. These standards can be utilized to measure program and service effectiveness and provide a predetermined standard of quality by which practitioners can compare their work (Komives & Arminio, 2011). Understanding the utilization and quality of programs and services provides the opportunity for student affairs practitioners to examine their affordability and cost-effectiveness in relation to divisional funding and resources. Assessment spurs a discussion regarding the continuation, modification, or dissolution of programs and services in order to best meet students’ needs (Davis Barham & Scott, 2006; Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

Assessment also plays an important role in strategic planning at both the institutional and divisional level. A comprehensive assessment plan can help student affairs define goals and objectives, identify critical issues, develop programs and services
based on students’ needs, and measure program and service effectiveness (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Engaging in outcomes based assessment garners specific information about divisional strengths and areas for improvement. Student affairs leaders can utilize this data to adjust the division’s strategic plan and effectively address students’ needs (Bresciani, 2010). Upcraft and Schuh (1996) also suggested that assessment is important to student affairs because it provides a basis for decision-making and policy development.

The value of assessment is that the process produces information that can be utilized to make informed, strategic decisions (Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009; Middaugh, 2010). Bresciani (2010) described a procedure professionals in student affairs can employ to utilize data obtained through outcomes-based assessment to inform strategic planning and budgeting. Bresciani first highlighted the importance of developing a strategic plan in order to align the division’s goals and objectives. As part of the planning process, the author articulated the importance of gathering forecast and trend data to aid in predicting the institution’s future state and environment. After gathering this data, student affairs professionals should examine the divisional resources, structures, and processes in place that make up the division’s capacity to accomplish the strategic plan.

Divisional leaders should identify success indicators and prioritize goals prior to implementing the strategic plan (Bresciani, 2010). Finally, implement an outcomes-based assessment plan in order to measure the progress and success of the division’s strategic plan. Utilization of outcomes-based assessment in Bresciani’s comprehensive approach to data-driven planning provides a mechanism for engaging in a successful strategic
planning process, making informed decisions, and developing effective policies based on the current needs of the division.

While assessment information can be used in policy development and decision making, Suskie (2004) noted that assessment results are not designed to prescribe decisions. The data collected should be evaluated based on student affairs professionals’ judgment and decisions should be made accordingly. Lastly, political pressures are an ever present reality in higher education. Student affairs assessment is important because it constitutes a mechanism for providing information of importance to key stakeholders (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996).

There are numerous internal and external forces that perpetuate the need for assessment in higher education. Demands for accountability, evidence of educational quality, and transparency of data-driven decisions and planning make assessment “a matter of survival” (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 7) in student affairs. To meet the need for continuous and comprehensive assessment of student affairs learning and development, student affairs divisions are challenged with the task of creating a culture of assessment. The six driving forces for assessment discussed in this section constitute a strong motive for student affairs divisions to embrace practices that support a sustainable culture of inquiry (Maki, 2004).

**Culture of Assessment in Student Affairs**

To effectively discuss culture, an overview of how culture is defined and manifested in an organization is provided in this section. O’Reilly and Chatman (1996) defined culture as a “system of shared values (that define what is important) and norms
that define appropriate attitudes and behaviors for organizational members (how to feel and behave)” (p. 160). Schein (2010) articulated three levels through which the essence of culture can be examined: (a) artifacts, (b) espoused values, and (c) basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts are the products of the group visible to the outside observer. Espoused values are the norms, rules, and values that provide guidance for group member behavior. Basic underlying assumptions are the implicit beliefs that guide behavior and shape group members’ perceptions (Schein, 2010). Viewed as an organizational unit, a division’s culture is “reflected in what is done, how it is done, and who is involved in doing it” (Tierney, 2008, p. 24).

Culp (2012) defined a culture of evidence as a commitment by student affairs practitioners “to use hard data to show how the programs they offer, the processes they implement, and the services they provide are effective and contribute significantly to an institution’s ability to reach its stated goals and fulfill its mission” (p. 5). Assessment scholars have identified the characteristics of a mature and successful culture of evidence in student affairs. Divisional leadership, institutional context, and internal and external driving forces work in concert to shape the culture of assessment in student affairs.

Through an examination of effective assessment practice at various institutions, Bresciani (2006) identified several characteristics of a culture based on evidence. First and foremost, Bresciani (2006) noted the importance of developing goals for the assessment process and utilizing outcomes-based assessment to evaluate the organization’s progress. Bresciani also noted the importance of institutional leaders developing trust through demonstrating consistency in regard to evidence-based decision-making.
making. Lastly, the importance of connecting student learning and its subsequent evaluation to curriculum design and professional development was emphasized.

Culp (2012) highlighted the importance of recognizing that there is not a universal approach to creating a culture of evidence in student affairs. From her experience in assessment, Culp highlighted four characteristics shared by mature and successful cultures of evidence. She first highlighted the importance of the culture of evidence being congruent with the mission and culture of the institution. The second characteristic emphasized the importance of a comprehensive and well-developed divisional assessment plan. The third element focused on the importance of providing professional development opportunities for practitioners. The final characteristic stressed the importance of closing the assessment loop through the provision of feedback on the assessment process and communication of assessment findings to the division, institution, and external constituents. In addition to understanding the characteristics of a culture of evidence, it is also important to examine the conditions that support a culture of assessment in student affairs.

Researchers have identified several conditions that promote assessment practice in student affairs divisions. Recognizing the conditions that support a culture of assessment provides valuable information for student affairs divisions seeking to establish a similar culture. Support from the SSAO is an essential factor in promoting a culture of assessment in student affairs divisions (ACPA, 2013; Busby & Robinson, 2012; Seagraves & Dean, 2010). Utilizing a focused case study approach, Seagraves and Dean (2010) explored the conditions supporting a culture of assessment at three small
colleges and universities. In this qualitative study, data derived from interviews with student affairs staff allowed the researchers to examine how the participants described the conditions that supported assessment at their institutions. Seagraves and Dean found the following conditions to support a culture of assessment: support from the SSAO, informal expectations regarding assessment, belief in improvement of programs and services through assessment efforts, and a collegial working environment. While this study is not generalizable to the larger population, it does highlight important conditions relevant to the promotion of a culture of assessment.

In a guidebook designed for student affairs leaders and practitioners, Busby and Robinson (2012) described the essential practices of SSAO needed to develop a divisional culture of evidence. The authors articulated that in order to develop a culture of evidence, a strong commitment to assessment practice and data-driven decision-making on behalf of the SSAO is required. Busby and Robinson (2012) highlighted several strategies that can be employed by the SSAO to assist in the creation of a culture of evidence: development of a division wide vision for assessment, work within the existing culture of the institution, develop relationships with institutional professionals engaged in assessment, communicate assessment-related information to the division, and provide opportunities for professional development related to assessment.

Other scholars in the field have echoed the importance of leadership in establishing assessment practice. Maki (2004) and Sandeen and Barr (2006) charged leaders with the responsibility of setting assessment as a divisional priority and situating the assessment process within the organization. Banta, Jones, and Black (2009) stressed
the important role of college administrators in articulating the essential need and critical function of a sustainable assessment process. Additionally, the authors called for student affairs leaders to be public advocates for the assessment process and provide support for divisional members as they practice assessment.

There is significant support in the literature for the importance of the SSAO in establishing and sustaining a culture of assessment, but the literature does not indicate the essential leadership competencies necessary to effectively establish and promote a culture of assessment. The next section provides a broad overview of the role, function, and professional competencies of the student affairs administrator.

**Professional Competencies of the SSAO**

As the champion of the division, the SSAO is responsible for providing the vision and direction for the organization. Winston, Creamer, and Miller (2001) presented three principal roles of the senior student affairs administrator: (a) educator, (b) leader, and (c) manager. The authors articulated the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that contribute to fulfilling the role described in each of these domains. Effective administrators have the capacity to perform the functions associated with each administrative role. An overview of Winston, Creamer, and Miller’s (2001) Model of Student Affairs Administration is presented in this section.

Winston, Creamer, and Miller (2001) conceptualized education as the fundamental domain of student affairs administration. Student affairs administrators have always held duties and responsibilities that are supportive of and contribute to the educational mission of higher education. The authors emphasize the importance of the
administer being teaching-oriented when working with students, divisional staff, and institutional faculty. The following categories comprise the behavioral characteristics of the educator domain: lecturing, demonstrating, advising, coaching, modeling, facilitating, learning, researching, evaluating, collaborating, and structuring.

Winston, Creamer, and Miller (2001) acknowledged the student affairs administrator’s formal placement within the student affairs division and the responsibility of this position to the institution. The student affairs administrator is responsible for articulating the vision of the organization and works to develop an environment in which the vision can be achieved. The authors presented the following behavioral characteristics associated with leadership: planning and organizing, problem solving, clarifying roles and objectives, informing, monitoring, motivating and inspiring, consulting, delegating, supporting, developing and mentoring, managing conflict and team building, networking, recognizing, and rewarding.

The final domain of student affairs administration illustrated by Winston, Creamer, and Miller (2001) is the role of manager. The student affairs administrator is responsible for overseeing all of the major functional areas within student affairs. The managerial function of student affairs requires competency in organizational management, institutional planning, assessment, and budgeting. The authors proposed nine categories of behavior associated with being a manager: supervising, planning and organizing, decision making, monitoring indicators, controlling, representing, coordinating, consulting, and administering. Understanding the principle roles of the student affairs administrator as an educator, leader, and manager provides a framework
for exploring the administrative competencies associated with promoting a culture of assessment in student affairs. In addition to the framework provided by Winston, Creamer, and Miller, ACPA and NASPA developed professional competency areas for student affairs practitioners to help guide practice and professional development.

In 2010, ACPA and NASPA jointly published a set of professional competency areas for student affairs practitioners. The professional competency areas described in this publication define the “broad professional knowledge, skills, and for some competencies, attitudes expected of student affairs professionals, regardless of their area of specialization or positional role within the field” (ACPA & NASPA, 2010, p. 4). The competency areas outlined by ACPA and NASPA, which are divided into basic, intermediate, and advanced levels, are intended to shape the professional development opportunities and training of professional staff in student affairs. Given the importance of assessment in student affairs today, one of the competency areas is devoted to assessment, evaluation, and research.

The Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER) competency area highlights the importance of utilizing AER processes throughout the student affairs division. As described in the advanced level of the AER competency area, divisional leadership is expected to “effectively lead the conceptualization and design of ongoing, systematic, high-quality, data-based strategies at the institutional, divisional, and/or unit-wide level to evaluate and assess learning, programs, services, and personnel” (ACPA & NASPA, 2010, p. 11). The advanced level also stresses the importance of creating a divisional expectation that AER is essential to professional practice. ACPA and NASPA’s (2010)
professional competency areas for student affairs practitioners is important because it highlights the important knowledge and skills required of senior student affairs leaders in regard to assessment.

**Conceptual Framework**

Assessment provides a mechanism for student affairs professionals to illustrate how their programs and services contribute to the academic mission of higher education (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Student affairs divisions have been challenged to create a culture of assessment that is able to provide evidence related to student learning outcomes. As previously discussed in the review of the literature, there are countless factors in higher education that influence the practice of assessment in student affairs divisions. Divisional leadership, institutional context, and internal and external driving forces work in concert to shape the culture of assessment in student affairs.

In order to explore how the SSAO promotes the practice of assessment in the student affairs division, it is important to understand how the SSAO is situated within the larger context of the institution. The conceptual framework for this study, *A Model of Assessment Culture in Student Affairs*, is presented in Figure 3.1. This model was adapted from the literature on assessment in student affairs (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996), organizational culture and leadership (Schein, 2010), and the role of the student affairs administrator (Winston, Creamer, & Miller, 2001).
Figure 2.1. A Model of Assessment Culture in Student Affairs. Elements adapted from Schein (2010), Upcraft & Schuh (1996), and Winston, Creamer, & Miller, (2001).

As previously mentioned, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) described six reasons why assessment is of critical importance to the work of student affairs professionals. The following are the driving forces for assessment in student affairs as depicted by Upcraft and Schuh (1996): (a) a matter of survival, (b) a matter of quality, (c) a matter of affordability, (d) a matter of strategic planning, (e) a matter of politics, and (f) a matter of policy development and decision making. The driving forces for assessment represent the internal and external pressures encountered by student affairs divisions and illuminate the necessity of a comprehensive approach to assessment. Represented by the six lines in
Figure 2.1, the driving forces for assessment transect the division of student affairs, the institutional context, and the external environment. It is important to note that these driving forces have the potential to be influenced by each of these contexts and vice versa.

The culture of assessment in the Division of Student Life, which is situated within the larger institutional context, is also presented in Figure 2.1. The essence of culture is depicted using the three levels of culture as described by Schein (2010): (a) artifacts, (b) espoused values, and (c) basic underlying assumptions. Artifacts are the visible products of the organization. Within a culture of assessment in student affairs, artifacts include annual reports, divisional memorandums, organizational charts, professional development materials, and strategic plans. Espoused values, the second layer of culture, are the norms, rules, and values that provide guidance for group member behavior. Basic underlying assumptions are the implicit beliefs that guide behavior and shape group members’ perceptions (Schein, 2010). This research study specifically examines how the senior student affairs officer’s beliefs, shared artifacts, and espoused values regarding assessment have evolved (or has not evolved) into an accepted assumption by the division as a whole.

As the leader of the division, the SSAO is responsible for providing vision and direction for the organization (Winston, Creamer, & Miller, 2001). Green, Jones, and Aloi (2008) articulated the importance of the SSAO in establishing assessment as a divisional priority. The innermost circle in Figure 2.1 represents the SSAO. The symbolic placement of the SSAO at the center of the division demonstrates the importance of the
divisional leader in providing focus and leadership for assessment practice in student affairs.

Comprised of three domains, the area surrounding the SSAO in Figure 2.1 represents the leadership competencies of the administrator. Winston, Creamer, and Miller (2001) presented three principal roles of the student affairs administrator: educator, leader, and manager. The authors articulated the knowledge, skills, and behaviors that contribute to fulfilling the role described in each of these domains. Effective administrators have the capacity to perform the functions associated with each administrative role. As depicted in Figure 2.1, there are numerous factors influencing the leadership of the SSAO and the culture of assessment within the division of student affairs. This conceptual framework is intended to situate the SSAO’s role in promoting a culture of assessment within the larger environmental and institutional context.

**Summary**

The purpose of this literature review was to provide a thorough overview of the literature pertaining to the role of the SSAO in promoting a culture of assessment in student affairs. The review began with an overview of the history of assessment in student affairs. The following section provided a review of the driving forces for assessment in student affairs as described by Upcraft and Schuh (1996) and supported in the literature. The review continued with an overview of literature pertaining to creating a culture of assessment in student affairs. Given the important role of the SSAO in creating a culture of assessment in student affairs as indicated in the literature, the professional competencies of the SSAO as described by Winston, Creamer, and Miller (2001) were
also presented. Finally, a model of assessment culture was presented to provide a visual representation of the literature reviewed in this chapter.
CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

Numerous scholars have indicated the importance of defining the research protocol when conducting qualitative inquiry (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010; Creswell, 2009; Glesne, 2011), such as a case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Merriam, 1998; Stake, 1995; Yin, 2009). Provided in this chapter is the research design for this qualitative case study. The chapter begins with an overview of the pilot study conducted prior to this investigation and the research design utilized in this study. The following sections detail the research questions explored in this study, the case selection process, the data sources, the participant selection process, and the role of the researcher in the study. The chapter concludes with the data collection and data analysis procedures.

Pilot Study

Conducting a pilot study assists the researcher in refining the methodology for the research study (Yin, 2009). In the spring of 2013, I submitted an expedited application to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Clemson University to conduct a study on the role of the SSAO in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University. A pseudonym, Randal University, was utilized to keep the identity of the institution and research participants confidential. The use of pseudonyms is a method commonly employed in qualitative research to preserve the anonymity of the research participants and maintain confidentiality (Glesne, 2011; Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008).
The letter of approval from the IRB for the pilot study can be found in Appendix A. Upon approval from the IRB (#IRB2013-166), the Vice President for Student Life at Randal University was contacted via email using the SSAO participant recruitment script found in Appendix B. Upon agreement to participate in the study, the SSAO was asked to identify three staff members from different functional units within the division for participation in the pilot study. Participants of the study had to meet the following criteria in order to participate in the pilot study: (a) the individual is a full-time or part-time Randal University employee within the Division of Student Life, and (b) the individual has been a Randal University employee within the Division of Student Life for a minimum of six months. Three staff members were recruited to participate in the pilot study using the recruitment script found in Appendix C.

A focused case study (Seagraves & Dean, 2010) was utilized to examine how staff members in the Division of Student Life at Randal University described the SSAO’s role in promoting a culture of assessment within the division. The following exploratory questions guided the pilot study:

- How do student life staff members describe the role of assessment practice within the division?
- How do student life staff members describe the role of the SSAO in promoting assessment practice within the division?

Interviews with three members of the student life staff comprised the data collection for the pilot study. The interview protocol found in Appendix D was utilized during the pilot
study investigation. Semi-structured interviews with student life staff members were conducted in-person at Randal University, audio recorded, and transcribed.

The data revealed three themes in regard to how the participants viewed the role of assessment within the division of student life: (a) a means of professionalizing the student life division, (b) a means of improving student life programs and services, and (c) a means of meeting expectations. Staff members articulated that assessment was a means of professionalizing the work of student life practitioners and felt that it was a way for them to “fight for their existence”. Staff members also reflected on the value of assessment as a way to measure and improve the effectiveness of their programs and services. Finally, all participants in the pilot study all articulated that assessment was a way of meeting expectations of their professional role within the division and the institution’s accrediting body.

The data also revealed three themes in regard to how student life staff members described the SSAO’s role in promoting assessment in the division: (a) communicating expectations, (b) building relationships, and (c) providing challenge and support. Three participants articulated that the SSAO communicated her expectations in regard to the division’s formal assessment process and set a clear vision for division’s assessment initiatives. The staff members also described the SSAO as a relationship builder, good communicator, advocate, facilitator, and collaborator. Finally, the participants reflected on the balance of challenge and support they experienced in regard to assessment practice. All three staff members expressed feeling challenged at one point or another in
regard to the expectations for assessment, but they also felt supported through learning and development opportunities provided by the SSAO.

The execution and findings of the pilot study significantly influenced the development of the research design for the proposed study. First, the findings of the pilot study are reflective of the literature surrounding the SSAO and a culture of assessment. Second, I discovered the interview questions utilized in the pilot study needed to be modified in order to garner more information about the methods of influence and specific actions of the SSAO in regard to cultivating assessment practice within the division. Third, the participant selection process was modified to include individuals outside of the Division of Student Life. A more intensive case study with a wider selection of participants and data sources has the potential to unveil significant information about the role of the SSAO in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University.

**Research Design**

A qualitative case study was used to examine the role of the SSAO in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University. As described by Merriam (2009), the purposes of qualitative inquiry are “to achieve an understanding of how people make sense out of their lives, delineate the process (rather than the outcome or product) of meaning-making, and describe how people interpret what they experience” (p. 14). Specifically, a case study design allows the researcher to examine in-depth the complexity of a particular case within a specific context (Stake, 1995; Yin, 2006). Stake (1995) defined three types of case studies: (a) intrinsic, (b)
instrumental, and (c) collective. An intrinsic case study is conducted because the researcher has an intrinsic interest in the case. An instrumental case study is conducted in order to provide insight into a specific issue. A collective case study is used to investigate a particular issue, population, or phenomenon across multiple cases (Stake, 1995, 2000).

The nature of this single case study is both intrinsic and instrumental. As noted by Stake (2000), there “is no hard-and-fast line distinguishing intrinsic case study from instrumental, but rather a zone of combined purpose” (p. 445). I have a dual purpose for selecting a case study design: (a) I have an intrinsic interest in how the SSAO promotes a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University, and (b) I want to examine this particular case in order to provide insight into the SSAO’s role in promoting a culture of assessment within student affairs divisions. The purpose of this study and the associated research questions are provided in the next section.

**Research Questions**

As noted in the literature, the leadership of the SSAO plays a crucial role in establishing and developing a culture of assessment in the division of student affairs (Banta, Jones, & Black, 2009; Culp & Dungy, 2012; Huba & Freed, 2000; Keeling et al., 2008; Maki, 2004; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Seagraves & Dean, 2010). Further investigation is needed to explore the methods through which the SSAO promotes a culture of assessment within the division of student affairs. The purpose of this case study is to examine how the SSAO promotes a culture of assessment in the Division of Student Life at Randal University. The following primary research question guided this study:
How does the SSAO promote a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University?

Based on the related literature, the following secondary questions also guided the investigation:

- How does the SSAO establish commitment from divisional staff members to engage in student affairs assessment?
- How do divisional staff members describe the role of the SSAO in promoting assessment practice within the division?
- What role does institutional planning and accreditation play in the SSAO’s commitment to promote assessment practice within the division of student life?

To examine the research questions presented in this section, a qualitative case study was conducted. As the study progresses, emic issues emerged from the case. Stake (1995) described emic issues as the “issues of the actors, the people who belong to the case” (p. 20). As these issues emerged, the research protocol was adjusted to explore the issues of the case connected to the primary research question. The next section details the process for selecting the case for this study.

**Case Selection**

In case study research, there are two levels of sampling: (a) the selection of the case, and (b) the selection of the participants within the case (Merriam, 1998). The selection of the case for this study is described in this section. Purposeful sampling was utilized to identify the case for this research study. As described by Merriam (1998),
“purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator wants to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). Selecting an information-rich case allows the researcher to explore the critical issues of the research study in-depth (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990; Stake, 1995). The case for this study is the Vice President for Student Life at Randal University.

The rationale for selecting the Vice President for Student Life at Randal University is twofold. First, I have an intrinsic interest in how the Vice President for Student Life at Randal University has created and sustained a culture of assessment. Through professional networking, I have become aware of the focus on assessment practice within the student life division. During the Vice President of Student Life’s tenure at the institution, assessment has become a mainstream practice within the division, which was not the case prior to her assuming leadership of the organization. Therefore, this case presents a unique opportunity to examine the role of the SSAO in promoting and sustaining a divisional culture of assessment in student affairs.

Secondly, I believe this is an opportunity to examine a highly operative culture of assessment within a division of student affairs. The espoused commitment of the division to assessment practice is stated on their website as:

The Division of Student Life will develop a culture of assessment which assumes that the entire university is a learning community. As a result, all activities, programs and services of the division should be implemented on the premise that they will be intertwined as a part of a comprehensive plan
which integrates the student’s academic and personal development (Randal University, 2013).

This statement embodies the student affairs profession’s commitment to student learning and to creating a culture of assessment (ACPA, 1996; ACPA & NASPA, 1998; NASPA & ACPA, 2004; Culp, 2012; Keeling, 2006; Keeling et al., 2008). Therefore, I believe this qualitative case study provides a unique opportunity to understand the SSAO’s role in promoting a culture of assessment within the division of student life. Upon approval from the Institutional Review Board (#IRB2013-166), the Vice President for Student Life at Randal University was contacted via email and agreed to participate in this research study.

Data Sources

Rich and rigorous data sources are imperative to the development of high-quality and robust qualitative research (Tracey, 2010; Yin, 2006). The data sources for this case study were selected based on the following three criteria: (a) the ability to produce data needed to understand the topic of interest, (b) contribution to the diversity of perspectives on the topic, and (c) effective utilization of the time available to carry out the study (Glesne, 2011). Interviews and documents were the primary sources of data for this study.

Interviews provide the researcher the opportunity to gather information that cannot be directly observed or found in documents (Merriam, 1998; Patton, 1990). For the purpose of this study, semi-structured interviews were conducted. Semi-structured interviews are based on the assumption that participants have unique and individualized
ways of defining their experiences (Merriam, 1998). This assumption allows the researcher to consistently inquire about the topic of interest while having the flexibility to adjust to the respondents’ worldview (Brenner, 2006; Yin, 2009). The interview protocol found in Appendix E was utilized for this case study. The use of interviews in this study provided the opportunity for me to gather the descriptions and interpretations of how the various participants perceived the role of the SSAO in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University.

Collection of pertinent documents provided me with “historical, demographic, and sometimes personal information that was unavailable from other sources” (Glesne, 2011, p. 85). Document review served as an extension of the data collected during the interviews. Documents serve as imperative sources of information for the case being studied and “serve as substitutes for records of activity that the researcher could not observe directly” (Stake, 1995, p. 68). Furthermore, documents can serve as a first-person account of an individual’s actions, experiences, attitudes, beliefs, and worldview (Merriam, 1998). The combination of these data sources allowed me to study the case from multiple perspectives and garner a deeper understanding of how the SSAO promotes a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life.

**Participant Selection**

The second phase of the sampling process is the selection of participants for the study (Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling was utilized to select the participants that will “best help the researcher understand the problem and research question” (Creswell, 2009, p. 178). Utilization of this method also provided the opportunity to select
participants based on certain attributes and characteristics that contributed to the richness of the data collected (Ary, Jacobs, & Sorensen, 2010; Patton, 2002). This section provides an overview of the Division of Student Life at Randal University and details the participant selection criteria.

Randal University is a private, liberal arts college located in the southeastern region of the United States. The institution has an approximate enrollment of 2700 students. As indicated in the online organizational chart, the Division of Student Life is comprised of 58 professional staff members (Randal University, 2014). The structure of the Division of Student Life with the respective number of professionals in each department is depicted in the organizational chart presented in Figure 3.1.

![Organizational Chart](image)

*Figure 3.1 Organizational Structure of the Division of Student Life with Number of Professional Staff in Each Functional Unit. Based on Division of Student Life organization chart, which was last updated February 2014 (Randal University).*

51
Presented in Table 3.1 is the professional classification of the Division of Student Life staff.

Table 3.1

*Professional Classification of Division of Student Life Staff at Randal University.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Senior Admin.</th>
<th>Director</th>
<th>Associate Director</th>
<th>Assistant Director</th>
<th>Coordinator</th>
<th>Manager/Supervisor</th>
<th>Admin. Assistant</th>
<th>Fitness Assistant</th>
<th>Clinical Professional</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campus Recreation</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Services</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Services</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Services</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing &amp; Residence Life</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Activities</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Programs</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Vice President</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note.* All classifications are based on the Division of Student Life organizational chart, which was last updated in February of 2014 (Randal University, 2014).

As demonstrated in Table 1, there are three senior administrators in the Division of Student Life, eight directors, four associate directors, ten assistant directors, five coordinators, three managers/supervisors, six administrative assistants, two fitness assistants, and seventeen clinical professionals. Participants selected for this study met the following criteria: (a) the professional was classified as a senior administrator, director, associate director, assistant director, or coordinator; (b) the individual is a full-time or part-time Randal University employee; and (c) the individual has been a Randal University employee for a minimum of six months. An employment span of six months.
was selected in order to give employees adequate time for professional training and acclimation to the institutional and divisional culture.

As indicated in policy 201.1 of the Randal University Staff Policies and Procedures Manual, the Vice President for Student Life is responsible for “creating, maintaining, and evaluating services and programs for the university community including, career services, health services, housing, multi-cultural affairs, recreational sports, student activities, leadership programs and psychological counseling” (Randal University, 2014). Given the administrative role of the SSAO in overseeing the aforementioned functional units, a representative sample of participants from each of these units were selected for this study. The three senior administrators and the head of each functional unit were recruited to participate in this study. One associate director, two assistant directors, and one coordinator from the four largest departments in the Division of Student Life were also recruited to participate in the study.

The rationale for selecting the leader of each functional unit is two-fold: (a) the head of each department reports directly to the Vice President for Student Life or the Assistant Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students, and (b) the head of each department are charged with overseeing the operations, programs, and services of the entire functional unit. The associate directors, assistant directors, and coordinators were recruited for the study in order to provide depth to the data collected. These professionals represent varying degrees of separation from the Vice President for Student Life and come from a diverse educational background. Selected participants were recruited for the study via email utilizing the script found in Appendix C. Follow up emails were sent to
potential participants if a response was not received within five days. If there was no response after the second email attempt, a phone call was made to the participant.

Provided in Table 3.2 is an overview of the available sample population based on the aforementioned participant selection criteria, the number of professionals that were recruited from each functional unit, and the number of professionals that participated in the study.

Table 3.2

Division of Student Life Participant Recruitment by Functional Unit.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Functional Unit</th>
<th>Total # of Professional Staff</th>
<th>Total # of Professional Staff Meeting Selection Criteria</th>
<th>Total # of Professional Staff Recruited for Study</th>
<th>Total # of Professional Staff that Participated in the Study</th>
<th>Percentage of Qualified Professional Staff that Participated in Study</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campus Recreation</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Career Services</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>33.33%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Counseling Services</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Health Services</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>n/a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing &amp; Residence Life</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>9</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Multicultural Affairs</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Activities</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Programs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Office of the Vice President</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>50%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Volunteer Services</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>100%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>58</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>13</td>
<td>42%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Note. The total number of professional staff in each functional unit was collected from the online organizational chart for the Division of Student Life (Randal University, 2014).

Three out of the sixteen professional staff contacted about the study were unable to participate. The reason for not participating in the study of the three recruited participants is provided in Table 3.3.
Table 3.3

*Reason for Not Participating in the Study of Recruited Participants in the Division of Student Life.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Recruited Participant</th>
<th>Reason for Not Participating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participant #10</td>
<td>No longer employed at institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #12</td>
<td>No response from participant after multiple contact attempts by researcher</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Participant #13</td>
<td>Unable to schedule an interview congruent with the research timeframe</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Additional Randal University employees valuable to answering the research question were identified through the data collection process. Two Randal University employees were identified by Division of Student Life participants as individuals that may be able to provide an outside perspective pertinent to the research study. Per the student life participants, the two identified individuals held positions at the institution in which the Vice President of Student Life routinely collaborated with specifically in regard to assessment. Utilizing the script found in Appendix C, the two individuals were contacted via email and invited to participate in the study. Both institutional employees agreed to participate in the study. Descriptive information regarding all 15 participants in this study will be provided in chapter four.

In the next section of this chapter, I provide an explanation of my perceived role as the researcher in this qualitative study. I believe it is important to acknowledge my position in the research process prior to detailing the procedure employed for data collection and data analysis.
Role of the Researcher

Engagement in the process of reflexivity enables the researcher to unveil and acknowledge the entanglement of self and subject (Finlay, 2002). Through engaging in this process, I do not intend to purge my subjectivity, but to let it be recognized and managed as I move through the research process (Peshkin, 1988). My ontological and epistemological position is congruent with the framework of interpretivism. I assume the ontological premise of a subjective reality constructed through meaningful interpretation by an individual based on their current perspective (Pascale, 2011; Sipe & Constable, 1996). Given this assumption about the nature of knowledge, I do not believe there is one objective truth. I believe truth is discovered and understood by an individual’s interpretation and meaning associated with their experiences and interactions with others.

As a researcher, I seek to understand the role of the SSAO in promoting a culture of assessment in the division of student affairs through the exploration of the meaning the SSAO and student affairs practitioners attribute to their professional interactions and experiences (Pascale, 2011). To investigate these experiences, I situate myself as an instrument in the research process (Patton, 2002) and acknowledge the integral role of the researcher in research design, data collection, data analysis, and the production of knowledge (Hsiung, 2008). As a researcher, I position myself as an integral component of my research and aspire to capitalize on the opportunities afforded by this position throughout the research process (Finlay, 2002). I believe that knowledge construction is a fluid process that changes from my experiences, including the research I conduct. As an interpretivist, I believe research is a transactional process and acknowledge that my way
of thinking has the potential to transform and be transformed by the research process (Pascale, 2011; Sipe & Constable, 1996).

**Data Collection**

Data for this study was comprised of participant interviews, documents, and researcher notes. Fifteen participants agreed to participate in this study. All interviews were conducted in person at Randal University during a three week period in January of 2014. Prior to starting the interview, I completed the following: (a) explained the purpose of the research study to the participant, (b) explained to the participant that involvement in the study was voluntary and confidential, (c) shared with the participant that the interview would be audio recorded, and (d) provided time for the participant to read the consent form (see Appendix F and Appendix G). After completion of these tasks, I utilized the interview protocol found in Appendix E to ask the participants a series of questions related to the research topic.

The pilot study significantly contributed to the development of the interview questions for this investigation. The interview protocol used in the pilot study (see Appendix D) was revised to include questions pertaining to the primary and secondary research questions. The probing questions were further developed based on a more extensive review of the literature and issues that emerged from the pilot study. During the interviews with the three pilot study participants, I learned that the interview questions needed to focus more on the behavior of the SSAO and her interactions with staff members. While staff participants extensively described assessment practice within their department and the division as a whole, I found it difficult to keep the discussion focused
on the SSAO. Modifications were made to the interview questions to capture thorough descriptions of how the SSAO promotes assessment practice within the division.

The semi-structured nature of the interviews allowed for the discussion to adapt as needed and derive rich explanations of the participants’ perceptions (Brenner, 2006; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). All of the interviews were audio recorded and lasted between 20 – 100 minutes. The average length of the interviews was 49 minutes. Upon completion, the audio files were downloaded to the researcher’s Clemson Box account for secure storage. The interviews were then promptly transcribed by the researcher. The participants were sent their respective transcripts to review for accuracy. This exercise provided the opportunity for member checking of the data (Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). One participant utilized this opportunity to clarify several comments from his interview. The modifications made to the participant’s transcript did not change the content of the data.

Based on the information revealed during the interviews, a list of requested documents was developed and sent to the senior leadership team in the Office of the Vice President. Clemson Box was utilized for the transfer and storage of documents. Additionally, two participants elected to share documents with the researcher via email following their interviews. Additional documents were downloaded from Randal University’s webpage. A list of documents collected during this study is provided in Appendix H. The researcher kept a journal throughout the duration of the study. Researcher notes were comprised of memos taken by the researcher during the
interviews, immediately following the interviews, during the transcription process, and throughout the first and second reading of the data.

**Data Analysis**

In qualitative research, data analysis is an “ongoing process involving continual reflection about the data” (Creswell, 2009, p. 184). The open-ended nature of qualitative inquiry provides the opportunity for the researcher to reflect upon the data as it is collected and explore emergent issues as they arise. As recommended by Clarke (2005), I engaged in a process of data reflection and absorption throughout the data collection process. Data analysis for this case study was conducted in four phases: (a) organizing and preparing the data for analysis; (b) coding transcripts, documents, and research notes; (c) interrelating themes/descriptions; and (d) data interpretation (Creswell, 2009).

A vital component of qualitative research is the organization and preparation of the data for analysis (Merriam, 1998). The participants’ interviews were audio recorded and promptly downloaded to Clemson Box for secure storage. All interview recordings were transcribed by the researcher using Microsoft Word and uploaded to Clemson Box for secure storage. Each participant was given a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. All documents collected for analysis and research notes were scanned, labeled by date and source, and saved in Clemson Box as they were received. Four participants were emailed a copy of their transcript to confirm accuracy of the data. One participant utilized the opportunity to clarify several comments from the interview. The modifications to the transcript did not alter the content of the data collected. The interview transcripts, documents, and research memos were uploaded into NVivo10.
NVivo10 is software designed to facilitate the organization and analysis of qualitative and mixed methods data (QSR International, 2012). Using a database to track and organize data improves the reliability of the case study (Baxter & Jack, 2008). Once the data was imported into NVivo10, I conducted initial open coding on the interview transcripts, documents, and research memos. This process was conducted concurrently with data collection to reveal emergent ideas and refine the study to explore these issues (Creswell, 2009; Merriam, 1998; Yin, 2009). Following initial open coding, I reorganized and reconfigured the list of codes from first cycle coding in order to develop a more concise list of codes to be used in second cycle coding (Saldaña, 2009).

Prior to engaging in the second cycle coding process, I again engaged in data reflection and absorption (Clarke, 2005). Utilizing the list of codes established after the first cycle of analysis, I recoded the data. After the second cycle of coding was complete, I utilized NVivo10 to organize the data into categories (Saldaña, 2009). As noted by Stake (1995) “the search for meaning often is a search for patterns, for consistency, for consistency within certain conditions” (p. 78). As I organized the data into categories, themes from the data emerged. Given the case study approach to this study, the aforementioned data analysis procedure allowed for patterns to emerge within a particular setting, therefore providing a window into the role assumed by the SSAO in promoting a culture of assessment within the division of student affairs.

Validation of Findings

Several strategies were employed to heighten the internal validity of the study: (a) triangulation, (b) member checks, and (c) acknowledge researcher biases. Merriam
(1998) suggested using multiple sources of data to verify emergent findings. In this case study, one-one-one interviews, documents, and researcher notes were used as data sources. The interviews were conducted with participants that were and were not employed in the Division of Student Life. The 15 participants varied in educational attainment, time at the institution, formal training in assessment, and degree of separation from the SSAO.

Member checks are another strategy for ensuring the accuracy of data (Merriam, 1998). The 15 participants were asked to review their interview transcripts and review them for accuracy. One participant utilized this opportunity to clarify several of his comments. The modifications made to the transcript did not change the content of the data. Given the role of the researcher in qualitative studies, I actively acknowledged my biases prior to and while engaging in the research process.

**Summary**

This chapter detailed the methodology for this research study. This chapter began with an overview of the pilot study conducted for this study. Following the review of the pilot study, an overview of the research design was presented. The next section explained the research questions that guided this study. Following the presentation of the research design, the case selection process, data sources, the participant selection process, and the role of the researcher in the study were presented. The procedures for collecting and analyzing the data for this study were then presented. This chapter concludes with an overview of strategies used to validate the findings of the study. In the next chapter, the findings of the study are presented.
CHAPTER FOUR
PRESENTATION OF FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to examine the role of the SSAO in promoting assessment practice within the Division of Student Life at Randal University. Presented in this chapter are the findings from the analysis of data collected during this single case study. Data for this study was comprised of participant interviews, documents, and researcher notes. Data analysis was conducted utilizing a four phase process: (a) organizing and preparing data for analysis; (b) coding transcripts, documents, and researcher notes; (c) interrelating themes/descriptions; and (d) data interpretation (Creswell, 2009). The following primary research question was explored throughout this study: How does the SSAO promote a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University?

Provided in this chapter is a summary of the data collected for this single case study. The chapter begins with a description of the case for this study. Descriptive information about Randal University, the Division of Student Life, and the Vice President for Student Life are provided. Following a description of the case, the participants of the study are introduced. The emergent themes of the study are then presented. The participants in this study perceived the SSAO as the spearhead of the division’s culture of assessment. Three themes emerged as the participants described how the SSAO creates and sustains the culture of assessment in the division: (a) ready the organization for evolution, (b) establish a supportive organizational infrastructure, and (c) utilize assessment data to inform practice. Three behavioral characteristics of the SSAO were
found to support her efforts in promoting assessment practice in the division: (a) relationship builder, (b) avid learner, and (c) strategic planner. The chapter concludes with a summary of the emergent themes of the case study. In the next section, a description of the case for the study is provided.

**Description of Case**

The case for this study was the Vice President for Student Life at Randal University. This section provides descriptive characteristics of Randal University, the Division of Student Life, and the Vice President for Student Life. The Vice President for Student Life, Madison, and the institution, Randal University, were assigned pseudonyms to protect their identity. Pseudonyms were utilized to protect the anonymity of the research participants and preserve confidentiality (Glesne, 2011; Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008).

**Randal University and the Division of Student Life**

Randal University is a private, liberal arts college located in the southeastern region of the United States with an approximate enrollment of 2700 students. The institution is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The Division of Student Life at Randal University provides services and programs to the university community in the following areas: (a) career services, (b) health services, (c) housing, (d) multicultural affairs, (e) recreational sports, (f) student activities, (g) leadership programs, and (h) psychological counseling. Depicted in Figure 4.1 is the organizational structure and functional units of responsibility of the Division of Student Life.
Figure 4.1. Division of Student Life Organizational Structure. Representation of organizational structure is adapted from Randal University Division of Student Life organizational chart, which was last updated in February of 2014 (Randal University, 2014).

The divisional mission statement is displayed publically on the institution’s website and through a PowerPoint presentation on the reception area television screen in the Office of Student Life. During the five visits I made to the case study site, the PowerPoint presentation was displayed on the television screen in the reception area. The following statement is the espoused mission of the Division of Student Life:

Our mission is to enhance the personal and academic growth of our students. Through innovative programs and a diverse residential community that supports the exchange of ideas, we promote discovery, collaboration, and civic engagement. We interact with students and
student organizations to address their concerns and provide services that
embrace the ideals of a liberal arts education. By creating an environment
where our students can thrive, we help create global citizens with a
passion for lifelong learning (Randal University, 2014).

The Division of Student Life is comprised of 58 professional staff. There are three
senior administrators in the Division of Student Life, eight directors, four associate
directors, 10 assistant directors, five coordinators, three managers/supervisors, six
administrative assistants, two fitness assistants, and 17 clinical professionals. There are
two administrative reporting lines for the programs and services within the division. The
Vice President for Student Life directly supervises the Assistant Vice President for
Student Life and Dean of Students and oversees the operations of campus recreation,
career services, counseling services, health services, and housing and residence life. The
Assistant Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students oversees the operations of
alcohol and drug education, diversity and inclusion programs, leadership programs, the
student center, student success programs, and volunteer services.

Vice President for Student Life

Madison assumed the position of Vice President for Student Life in February of
2008. As the Vice President for Student Life at Randal University, Madison is
responsible for “creating, maintaining, and evaluating services and programs for the
university community including, career services, health services, housing, multicultural
affairs, recreational sports, student activities, leadership programs and psychological
counseling” (Randal University, 2013). She is considered the senior student affairs
officer at the institution. Prior to her employment at Randal University, Madison held administrative positions in housing and residence life, campus services, and campus planning. Including her time at Randal University, she has 30 years of experience in higher education and student affairs. Madison holds two graduate degrees. She received her Master of Education degree in Counselor Education (Student Personnel Services) from North Carolina State University and Master of Business Administration degree from Wake Forest University. She also holds two Bachelor of Science degrees in Biological Sciences and Science Education, respectively, from North Carolina State University. This section has provided a description of the case, the Vice President for Student Life at Randal University, for this study. The next section of this chapter introduces the fifteen participants that participated in this study.

**Introduction to Participants**

A total of 15 Randal University employees participated in this study. Of the 15 participants, 13 held positions in the Division of Student Life and two held positions at the university outside of the division. During the interviews, all participants were asked to describe their professional role, length of employment at the institution, and educational background. All 15 participants were given pseudonyms to protect their identity (Glesne, 2011; Wiles, Crow, Heath, & Charles, 2008).

**Division of Student Life Participants**

Table 4.1 provides a summary of the demographic information for the 13 Division of Student Life participants.
Table 4.1

*Demographic Information of Division of Student Life Participants.*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Functional Area</th>
<th>Time at Institution (Years)</th>
<th>Level of Educational Attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>William</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Student Activities</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>MEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kade</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Housing and Residence Life</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Greg</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Counseling Center</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Courtney</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Diversity and Inclusion</td>
<td>18</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ben</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Campus Recreation</td>
<td>30</td>
<td>EdD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Curt</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Housing and Residence Life</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>MEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hayden</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Career Services</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelby</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Volunteer Services</td>
<td>25</td>
<td>HSD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lori</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Leadership Programs</td>
<td>19</td>
<td>MEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michael</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Office of the Vice President</td>
<td>14</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morgan</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Office of the Vice President</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>AS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madison</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Office of the Vice President</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>MBA, MEd</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Shelia</td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>Greek Affairs</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>MEd</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Of the 13 student life participants, seven (53.8%) were male and six (46.2%) were female. The average length of employment of the participants from the Division of Student Life was 13.2 years. Eleven (84.6%) of the participants held graduate degrees. Six (46.2%) participants held terminal degrees and five (38.5%) participants held master’s degrees. Three of the participants (23%), William, Kade, and Courtney, are alumni of the institution.
University Participants

During the interviews, the student life staff participants identified two university employees valuable to answering the research question. Table 4.2 provides a summary of the demographic information for the two participants employed at the institution outside of the Division of Student Life.

Table 4.2

Demographic Information of University Participants.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Functional Area</th>
<th>Time at Institution (Years)</th>
<th>Level of Educational Attainment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Austin</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Institutional Research and Assessment</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>MAE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bill</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>Academic Affairs</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>PhD</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both of the university participants (100%) were male and held graduate degrees. One of the participants (50%) held a terminal degree and one of the participants (50%) held a master’s degree. The average length of employment of the university participants was 24 years.

This section provided descriptive information about the 15 participants in this case study. The emergent themes of the case study are presented in the next section.

Emerging Themes

The purpose of this single case study was to gain an understanding of the role the SSAO at Randal University plays in promoting assessment practice within the Division of Student Life. Figure 4.2 provides a summary of the emerging themes of this study.
How do divisional staff members describe the role of the SSAO in promoting assessment practice within the division?

Divisional staff members perceive the SSAO as the Spearhead of the Culture of Assessment.

How does the SSAO promote a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University?

Evolutionary Process: SSAO employed three strategies to promote the practice of assessment within the Division of Student Life.

- **Ready the Organization for Evolution**
  - Assessed the understanding and practice of assessment in the division
  - Encouraged staff to challenge the status quo
  - Defined the expectation of assessment practice

- **Establish a Supportive Organizational Infrastructure**
  - Empower a champion to operationalize assessment practice
  - Provide financial resources to support assessment
  - Encourage a collaborative approach to assessment practice

- **Utilize Assessment Data to Inform Practice**
  - Make data-driven decisions
  - Advocate for the division
  - Strategically plan the future direction of the division

**Behavioral Characteristics of the SSAO**
- Avid Learner • Relationship Builder • Strategic Planner

SSAO Establishes a Divisional Commitment to Practice Assessment

*Figure 4.2. Summary of emerging themes.*

The first emergent theme, SSAO is the Spearhead of the Culture of Assessment, was revealed as the participants described how they perceived the SSAO’s role in promoting assessment practice within the division. When exploring how the SSAO
promoted assessment practice within the Division of Student Life, the participants described the development of assessment practice as an evolutionary process. Throughout the evolution of assessment practice in the division, three themes emerged as the participants described how the SSAO promotes assessment practice in the division: (a) ready the organization for evolution, (b) establish a supportive organizational infrastructure, and (c) utilize assessment data to inform practice.

Three behavioral characteristics of the SSAO were found to support her efforts in promoting and establishing commitment to assessment practice in the division: (a) relationship builder, (b) avid learner, and (c) strategic planner. In Figure 4.2, the behavioral characteristics are depicted as the foundation for the SSAO’s efforts in promoting the practice of assessment in the division. At the bottom of Figure 4.2, a two-directional arrow is depicted to illustrate that a divisional commitment to assessment was developed as the SSAO promoted assessment practice in the division. Rich descriptions of the emergent themes are provided in the subsequent sections of this chapter.

In order to accomplish the purpose of this study, it was first important to understand how the staff in the Division of Student Life described the role of the SSAO in promoting assessment practice within the division.

**Spearhead of the Culture of Assessment**

All 15 participants shared their perspective on the SSAO’s role in promoting assessment practice within the division. One theme emerged from the various perceptions of the participants: the SSAO is the spearhead of the culture of assessment. Divisional staff members perceived the Vice President for Student Life as the spearhead of the
culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University. William, a professional staff member in student activities, commented on her role by stating, “She’s the spearhead. She has to be the initiator. If she didn’t, I don’t think we would do it [assessment] as much or as formally as we do it.” Another student life participant, Michael, emphasized the importance of the SSAO in championing the culture of assessment within the division. He commented on her role in promoting assessment practice as the divisional leader by stating, “It’s vital. I think your vice president or your chief student affairs officers will make or break assessment.”

Several longtime staff members shared their perception of assessment practice in the division prior to Madison’s arrival at the institution. Participants noted that some staff members in the division did practice assessment prior to Madison’s leadership. However, the approach to assessment practice was described as being “lackadaisical”, “haphazard”, and “self-selected”. The participants reported that there was not a formal process or expectation for assessment practice within the division prior to Madison’s arrival. Courtney, an employee in the division for 18 years, shared, “assessment prior to her being here wasn’t a requirement, wasn’t an expectation.” Hayden, a longtime staff member of 15 years, described his perception of Madison’s role in promoting assessment practice within the division by stating:

She plays the primary role. My guess again is that there would be a relatively small handful of student life departments that did assessment if it weren’t for Madison….She is the primary motivating factor in student life as to why we all now, every department, does assessment. If it weren’t
for Madison, we wouldn’t be doing it. Like I said, it started under her predecessor, but she really ramped it up.

The participants from outside of the Division of Student Life echoed the perceptions of the student life participants. Bill, an employee of the institution for 38 years, described the approach to assessment practice as “laissez faire” prior to Madison’s leadership of the division. When asked to comment on the SSAO’s role in promoting divisional assessment practice, Bill stated, “She I think was an important game changer in making certain that her division became attentive to seeing the advantages of always building an assessment component into what was being done.” Bill elaborated on his comment by stating, “I think Madison’s leadership and insistence that the assessment component be a part of the activities that happen in student life has been key to creating that culture.”

Madison also reflected on her role in promoting assessment practice within the Division of Student Life. When asked “what role do you believe you play in creating and sustaining a culture of assessment?” Madison replied, “I have to be a champion of it.” Madison’s perception of her role in promoting assessment practice within the division is congruent with the perceptions of other participants in the study. Participants both in and outside of the Division of Student Life perceived the SSAO to be the spearhead of the culture of assessment. The next section of this chapter focuses on how the SSAO promotes a culture of assessment within the division.
Evolving the Culture of Assessment

The following primary research question guided this investigation: How does the SSAO promote a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University? Developing a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University was described by the participants as an evolutionary process. Three themes emerged from the data as the participants described how the SSAO created and sustained a culture of assessment in the division: (a) ready the organization for evolution, (b) establish a supportive organizational infrastructure, and (c) utilize assessment data to inform practice. The first theme, ready the organization for evolution, has three subthemes: (a) assessed the understanding and practice of assessment in the division, (b) encouraged staff to question the status quo, and (c) defined the expectation of assessment practice. The second theme, establish a supportive organizational infrastructure, has three subthemes: (a) empower a champion to operationalize assessment practice, (b) provide financial resources to support assessment, and (c) encourage a collaborative approach to assessment practice. The third theme, utilize data to inform practice, has three subthemes: (a) make data-driven decisions, (b) advocate for the division, and (c) strategically plan the future direction of the division. A summary of the emergent themes and subthemes are provided in Table 4.3.
Table 4.3

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Emerging Theme</th>
<th>Subthemes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ready the organization for evolution</td>
<td>Assessed the understanding and practice of assessment in the division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouraged staff to challenge the status quo</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Defined the expectation of assessment practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establish a supportive organizational infrastructure</td>
<td>Empower a champion to operationalize assessment practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Provide financial resources to support assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encourage a collaborative approach to assessment practice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Utilize assessment to inform practice</td>
<td>Make data-driven decisions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Advocate for the division</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Strategically plan the future direction of the division</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first emergent theme, ready the organization for evolution, is presented in the next section.

Ready the Organization for Evolution. The participants in this study described the development of the assessment culture as an evolutionary process within the Division of Student Life. The Vice President for Student Life, Madison, summarized the development of the assessment culture by stating, “We’ve had to evolve.” Curt, a participant from housing and residence life, described the process by stating, “They’re
transitioning it in. They’re not trying to go from zero to sixty overnight.” Three subthemes emerged from the data regarding how the SSAO readied the division for the practice of assessment to evolve: (a) assessed the understanding and practice of assessment in the division, (b) developed a guiding philosophy of assessment, and (c) defined the expectation of assessment practice. The first subtheme, assessed the understanding and practice of assessment in the division, is discussed in the next section.

**Assessed the understanding and practice of assessment in the division.** Analysis of the data revealed that the SSAO made an intentional effort to do the following: (a) get to know the student life staff and the daily operations of the division, (b) understand how assessment is presently used in the division, and (c) determine the gaps in assessment practice. As the participants described Madison’s role in promoting assessment practice in the division, several staff members reflected back on her first couple of years as the SSAO. Greg, a staff member of 18 years, shared the following: “You know, when she first arrived [at the institution] I don’t remember assessment being something that she led with. I think she spent the initial part of her time here getting to know what we were doing.”

Shelby, a student life staff member of 25 years, described a similar perception about the SSAO’s arrival. Shelby reflected on her perceptions of the new SSAO after the first couple of meetings with Madison:

She didn’t have an ax to grind, she did not have an agenda. Although really and truly, she had plans in the back of her head, but she just didn’t come out and say ok there’s a new game in town and I’m it and it’s going
to be this and this. She did it in such a way that it was almost like the Pied Piper. Just in conversation, she’s very relational, you know. I guess that’s my understanding. And it would be like so tell me what you do and that’s how she got us. Just the one-on-ones and it wasn’t a one-on-one like you were being interviewed. It was ‘are you free for lunch?’ You know. And without realizing it she was getting to know us and making that relationship so that no one felt threatened.

Madison also reflected back on her first year as the Vice President for Student Life and how she began to develop the assessment culture in the division. She shared that she believed she had to learn her staff, their programs, and how decisions were made in the division. She emphasized this point by stating, “So getting to know your staff is very important and then getting to know their programs and how they view it. What did they view as their role in the student experience?” Madison shared that she learned the daily operations of the division by doing the following:

- Listening to staff describe their programs
- Attending divisional programs and activities
- Asking detailed questions about programming, operations, and general daily practice
- Reading annual reports and meeting reports
- One-on-one meetings with staff members
- Divisional and director staff meetings
- Casual lunch meetings
As Madison learned the daily operations of the division, she also began to understand the practice of assessment within the division. After reviewing divisional reports and meeting with staff, Madison perceived the assessment data at the time to be primarily self-reported information from students collected from satisfaction and quality of life surveys. She noted that “it was hard for me to tell if it informed practice. I think what it did is it kind of gave them a grade.” As Madison explored the utilization of assessment data to inform the work of the division, she began to determine the gaps in assessment practice.

Reflecting upon the initial gaps she observed in the practice of assessment, Madison stated, “Where I think I saw what was lacking is there did not seem to be a model of regularity to it….Then the other gap seemed to be that it was one type of data collection.” Madison’s conclusion regarding the state of assessment practice in the division is consistent with how the student life staff and university participants described the practice of assessment prior to her arrival. As previously mentioned, participants described the approach to assessment practice was described as “lackadaisical”, “haphazard”, and “laissez faire” without any formal expectation for a routine assessment process. As Madison gained an understanding of how assessment data informed or did not inform practice within the division, she began to encourage staff to challenge the status quo in their daily work.

**Encouraged staff to challenge the status quo.** As the participants described how Madison readied the organization for evolution, staff members in and outside of the Division of Student Life commented on how she encouraged staff to critically think about
their programs and services. Madison challenged student life staff members to question if the current way of doing things was the best and most effective way for the student experience, the department, and the institution. Shelby commented on the way her programs were carried out prior to Madison’s arrival at the institution and her thoughts on how Madison challenged her to think about her work by stating:

    There was never change, we just, it had worked and we had success and we continued. Well when Madison came six years ago, she opened this window of, you know, have you ever thought about the possibility of maybe going in this direction, not that this is wrong, but have you ever just thought about that? Actually getting us to think outside the box and truthfully we had not.

Bill, a colleague in the Office of Academic Affairs, shared his thoughts about how Madison challenged the student life staff to question the status quo by stating:

    She made people understand that it’s a healthy thing to question the status quo. That was one of the biggest hills for her to climb….There were a lot of long serving staff in her area that were very wedded to a certain process and way of going about doing things that she had to think about how do I change that way of thinking so that they would at least consider openly another way of approaching something. So I know the first several years she just simply would have to sit down with people and say ok why is it that you do this? You know, do you feel as though that’s really achieving the outcome that you want it to? Asking very hard pointed questions. Have
you thought about this? Or have you thought about that? And she made it clear that the wrong answer was well we hadn’t thought about that because that’s just not the way we do it here. And she forced them to make certain that they had a rationale that was defensible for all of the activities that they were doing. And she understood that all the politics and everything else that maybe at play were things that she had to be sensitive to. And she had to pace this conversation, but she was relentless and didn’t allow people to hide behind tradition in accepting whether or not a particular way of doing something was the right way or the wrong way. They really needed to make certain that they could prove that, she insisted that they could prove that, whatever way they were doing it really was in the best interest of the institution and really was the most effective way.

Madison’s challenge to the staff to critically think about their programs and services opened the door for her to ask how they knew their programs were successful and how they knew their current method of delivery was the most effective.

While most student life participants viewed Madison’s challenge of the status quo as a nonthreatening experience, some participants did express discontentment with the SSAO’s approach. One participant described feeling as though they were being asked to prove the worth and value of their programs to the student experience, the division, and the institution. The participant reflected back on the SSAO’s challenge to question the status quo by stating:
You all need to have some, you know, understanding of why you’re doing what you’re doing, who you’re doing it for, the effect it’s having and this is how we’re going to make decisions in the division about what stays and what goes away. So collect your data and prove [laughs] that you’re, you know, you’re programs are worthy.

While the majority of the participants did not express feeling as though they had to prove the worthiness of their programs, it is important to acknowledge that there was both contentment and discontentment with how the SSAO challenged divisional staff members to question the effectiveness of their programs and services.

As the SSAO gained an understanding of how the division functioned and challenged staff to challenge their current way of carrying out their programs and services, she then began to formally define the expectation for assessment practice within the division.

**Defined the expectation of assessment practice.** As Madison learned how assessment was perceived in the division and began to challenge staff to provide rationale for their programs and services, she worked with the division to develop a philosophy statement about assessment. Within her first year as the Vice President for Student Life, she worked with the staff develop a strategic plan for the division. A committee of divisional staff was assembled to develop the strategic plan. Director-level staff were updated regularly on the committee’s progress and asked to weigh in on the issues the committee brought forward.
The group began to question how they could continuously evaluate their programs and services. As a result, Madison encouraged the division to develop an assessment philosophy statement. This statement is displayed publically on the Division of Student Life’s website. The division’s mission statement webpage reads “The Division of Student life has developed a comprehensive plan to ensure it meets its mission. View how we plan to achieve our goals.” This statement is hyperlinked to a webpage entitled “Assessment and Evaluation”. The comprehensive Division of Student Life assessment philosophy statement is provided in Appendix I. An excerpt from the statement is provided below:

The Division of Student Life will develop a culture of assessment which assumes that the entire university is a learning community. As a result, all activities, programs and services of the Division should be implemented on the premise that they will be intertwined as a part of a comprehensive plan which integrates the student’s academic and personal development. Departments within the Division will use assessment and benchmarking techniques to consistently evaluate the programs and services provided to Randal students on an annual basis. Benchmarking research will include comparison studies with the Associated Colleges of the South, comparable and aspirant institutional lists. The Departments within the Division will use the learning outcomes model of evaluation on all major programs on a three year rotation basis (i.e. every major program will be evaluated at
least once every three years using this model) to ensure that our activities continue to meet the overall educational mission of the university. This philosophy statement clearly espouses the division’s intent to develop a culture of assessment and the purpose of assessment within the division. Along with the public statement about assessment, Madison communicated the expectation for practicing assessment to divisional staff.

In support of the division’s philosophy of assessment, Madison communicated the expectation for assessment practice in the division. Participants shared that Madison made it clear in both divisional, director, and one-on-one meetings that assessment is a priority. Staff members at all levels of the organization, from new entry-level staff members to longtime mid-manager staff members, demonstrated an understanding of the expectation for assessment in the division and shared that Madison regularly talks about assessment in staff meetings. Michael shared that Madison formally “handed down the creed to all of our directors that this [assessment] is a priority.” Another participant, Hayden, described Madison’s role in the culture of assessment as “ramping it up.” When asked about the actions she used to “ramp up” assessment in the division, Hayden responded:

She said you all are going to do assessment. [Laughs] There was no ambiguity in it. I can remember some of the first meetings we had with her bringing up that topic and for me it was like well we’re already doing it, but other people it probably took them out of their comfort zone. But she
was unequivocal in that we will be doing assessment, you will be doing assessment reports and everybody is going to have to do this.

In addition to clearly stating her expectation of assessment, Madison also articulated concise goals for staff to accomplish in regard to assessment practice, as evidenced by the division’s assessment philosophy statement. Kade, a student life staff member of five years, shared his perception of the assessment expectation:

   And now everybody is doing annual assessment, so yeah I think she’s had a lot to do with that in her leadership. And again that’s setting the expectation that everyone would do assessment every year and it doesn’t have to be a thousand projects, but everyone is to pick something, make a report, and submit that information. So, what she’s done is change the culture to where it is expected that everyone’s going to have to do it.

Madison also reflected back on the first goal for divisional assessment practice. She shared her perspective on setting the first goal for division-wide assessment practice:

   I gave them a goal. I wanted every area to have three programs or major activities that they were going to assess every year and have comparative data to collect….I picked three plucked from the air just so they wouldn’t be overcome with oh my gosh I’ve got to do every single thing every year.

Looking back on those first couple of years as the SSAO, Madison described the first steps of evolving the culture of assessment as “spoon feeding them a little bit into the assessment world.” Madison realized that she had to pace the development of assessment practice in the division.
This section has provided evidence of how the SSAO readied the division of student life to practice assessment. Three themes emerged from the data regarding how the SSAO readied the division for the practice of assessment to evolve: (a) assessed the understanding and practice of assessment in the division, (b) challenged the status quo, and (c) defined the expectation of assessment practice. The next section of this chapter discusses how the SSAO promoted a culture of assessment through establishing a supportive organizational infrastructure.

Establish a Supportive Organizational Infrastructure. The SSAO in this study promoted a culture of assessment through establishing a supportive organizational infrastructure, the second theme to emerge from the data regarding the evolving practice of assessment in the division. Madison reflected on the continued evolution of the assessment culture by stating:

I also didn’t have the staff structure in place and all of the departments that I thought I needed with the expertise to go full blown, you know, let’s give them learning reconsidered and those kinds of things. Let’s put them through an assessment course and that kind of stuff. They would’ve freaked.

Madison recognized the need for the organizational infrastructure to be supportive of assessment practice and ensure accountability within the division. Three subthemes emerged as the participants described how the SSAO established a supportive organizational infrastructure: (a) empower a champion to operationalize assessment practice, (b) provide financial resources to support assessment, and (c) encourage a
collaborative approach to assessment practice. Supportive evidence of these three subthemes is provided in this section.

**Empower a champion to operationalize assessment practice.** All of the participants in the study emphasized the critical role of Michael, the Assistant Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students, as the champion of assessment practice within the division. Divisional staff members recognized that the overall charge for assessment in the division was from the SSAO. However, they articulated that Michael was the primary influence on their assessment planning, implementation, and reporting process. The participants described Michael as the individual that operationalized the current practice of assessment within the Division of Student Life.

The Assistant Vice President for Student Life and Dean of Students position was established in April of 2011, three years after Madison assumed the role of Vice President for Student Life. Among many other tasks, the formal position description indicates the position’s responsibility for overseeing assessment in the division and professional development for staff. Madison stressed the importance of establishing a champion for assessment practice in order to further evolve the assessment culture. Michael described his perspective on assuming the lead role in operationalizing assessment practice in the division:

The assessment effort kind of came in with me in my role. She [Madison] made it a priority before me, but it wasn’t systematized. So it was kind of, people were kind of just doing what they could do and she was trying to supervise eleven direct reports before me. So, you can only do so much
and try to get people to a certain point when you have that many. So, I think several things, but splitting out those direct reports, allowing each of us to give more attention then, you know, we split those now. With my working with assessment in the grad program and, you know, it was just a natural fit. She’s just kind of empowered me to kind of run with that.

Greg, a student life employee of 18 years, described the restructuring of the division to include Michael as the champion for assessment as a “quantum jump” in the evolution of assessment practice within the division. Other student life participants noted the critical shift in assessment practice that occurred when Michael assumed this new role, specifically regarding assessment-related professional development opportunities.

In discussing his charge to operationalize assessment practice in the division, Michael stated, “When Madison hired me in this role, one of the things she said was we need to get our division to a place where we embrace assessment and do it and make decisions based on the data.” Two strategies have enabled Michael to operationalize assessment practice in the division: (a) offering an educational assessment seminar, and (b) establishing a formal annual assessment practice and reporting process. Given the number of longtime employees in the division, the senior leadership team recognized the need to educate the staff in regard to assessment. Madison and Michael both emphasized their belief in the importance of educating staff and giving them the resources to successfully practice assessment. The senior leadership team recognized the need to offer initial training or a refresher to staff, specifically those individuals that did not have assessment training through a graduate preparation program.

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Michael had prior teaching experience at the graduate level in student affairs assessment. He adapted the graduate course curriculum from a master’s level assessment course into a semester long seminar, which consists of one-hour sessions over the course of 11 weeks. The seminar is offered to all student life staff and other colleagues at the institution interested in learning more about learning outcomes-based assessment. The following rationale for the seminar is provided in the syllabus:

Due to demands for greater accountability, decreases in funding for higher education, and other factors shaping today’s higher education climate, assessment is now one of the fastest growing areas of responsibility for higher education professionals. In the years to come, graduates of student affairs master’s programs (and other higher education professionals) will be called upon—more than ever before—to justify their program’s existence. Knowledge of assessment content areas and proficiency in assessment practices will be critical to your success as a practitioner in student affairs or academic affairs (Randal University, 2014).

The seminar syllabus also details the learning objectives for the course:

- To understand the major accountability and assessment issues facing higher education.
- To understand the purpose and role of assessment in student affairs and higher education.
- To become aware of and identify various types of assessment and assessment design, including needs assessment, satisfaction,
participation, outcomes assessment, benchmarking, cost effectiveness assessment, and professional standards assessment.

- To understand a range of student learning outcomes and their measures.
- To gain knowledge of assessment instruments and selection of data collection methods (Randal University, 2014).

All participants in the seminar are given a copy of six required texts. These text books, which includes a copy of the CAS standards, an assessment methodology in student affairs textbook, a copy of the ASK standards, and several other publications centered on student learning outcomes to utilize as a reference when practicing assessment. A complete list of the text books provided to the assessment seminar participants is provided in Table 4.4.

Table 4.4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Author</th>
<th>Publication Date</th>
<th>Title</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Schuh, J. H.</td>
<td>2009</td>
<td>Assessment Methods for Student Affairs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collins, K. M., &amp; Roberts, D. M.</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>Learning is Not a Sprint: Assessing and Documenting Student Leader Learning in Co-curricular Involvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>American College Personnel Association</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>ASK Standards: Assessment Skills and Knowledge Content Standards for Student Affairs Practitioners and Scholars</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education</td>
<td>2012</td>
<td>CAS Professional Standards in Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Strayhorn, T. L.</td>
<td>2006</td>
<td>Frameworks for Assessing Learning and Development Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gahagan, J., Dingfelder, J., &amp; Katharine, P.</td>
<td>2010</td>
<td>A Faculty and Staff Guide to Creating Learning Outcomes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
At the time of the interview, the seminar had been offered twice to staff in the division, once in the fall of 2012 and once in the fall of 2013. During the first year, the seminar was taught by Michael. In the second year, Michael and Courtney co-taught the assessment seminar. The course is open to staff members in the Division of Student Life, which are given priority for participation, and other staff and faculty members at the institution. While the seminar course is not a mandatory requirement within the division, the participants shared that the senior leadership team highly encouraged participation in the assessment seminar. Michael described the seminar as a “way to catch up our whole division.” Table 4.5 provides a summary of the topics covered throughout the 14 week assessment seminar.

Table 4.5

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Week</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Review Seminar Syllabus; Distribute Texts; Review Division’s Assessment Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Factors Shaping the Assessment Climate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Types of Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Individual Assessment Project Development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Student Learning Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Student Learning Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>CAS Standards and FALDOs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Student Learning Outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Individual Assessment Project Status Report</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Implementing Data Collection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Selecting, Sampling, and Soliciting Subjects</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Instrumentation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Writing Reports and Conducting Briefings; Evaluation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Luncheon</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Following the seminar, Michael asks the participants to evaluate the assessment seminar and provide feedback for improvement. When asked to evaluate the statement,
“this seminar was a worthwhile professional development opportunity for me,” 71% (5 staff members) of the 2013 participants strongly agreed and the remaining 29% (2 staff members) agreed. Michael commented on the professional development opportunities in regard to assessment by stating:

I think being systematic, giving your people the tools they need, and then giving them the support they need. So, if you do that, what our experience has been is that people are on board and are getting more comfortable with it. Even folks who haven’t been brought up through a professional program, track, you know. We have some folks that have been here for a while, who were just here at a different time. And we’re even bringing those folks along in understanding and going through the seminar.

Michael, Madison, and several student life participants emphasized the importance of educating staff about assessment in order develop the culture. Curt summarized this point by saying, “understanding breeds acceptance.” Student life staff viewed the assessment seminar as validation from the SSAO that she is committed to the division practicing assessment. When asked what actions demonstrate Madison’s commitment to practicing assessment, Hayden replied:

I think the biggest one that comes to mind is going to be that she established an assessment training program. She tasked our Dean of Students, Michael, with that, but she actually implemented a training program for those of us that are in student life to educate us. She didn’t
just say ok here I want you to learn about assessment, read the CAS
standards and, you know, go assess.

The assessment seminar was highly regarded in the division as a positive support
mechanism for the division’s culture of assessment.

The development of an annual assessment and reporting process was also
highlighted by the participants as a way Michael operationalized assessment practice in
the division. Michael established a timeline for assessment planning, implementation, and
reporting. The timeline is displayed in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Due Date</th>
<th>Action Item(s)</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>August 1st</td>
<td>Key goals and learning outcomes are due. Each staff member responsible for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>assessment must submit the key goals for the upcoming academic year, which</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>includes outlining the intended learning outcomes for the department, program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>or service.</td>
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<tr>
<td>October 1st</td>
<td>Assessment plan and methodology is due. Each staff member responsible for</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>assessment must submit their assessment plan and outline the intended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>methodology.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February 1st</td>
<td>Assessment “pulse” check is due. An informal status report from each staff</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>member responsible for an assessment project to ensure implementation is</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>happening as scheduled. Assistance will be offered again to staff if needed.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June 1st</td>
<td>Assessment Report due. Each staff member responsible for assessment must</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>submit their assessment results, highlighted results from other assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>projects, spotlights, collaborative efforts, and direction for the future.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Prior to the deadlines noted in Table 4.6, participants shared that Michael sends reminder
emails to the staff and follow up emails if the information is not received on time.

As noted in the timeline in Table 4.6, each staff member responsible for
assessment must submit an assessment report. Madison and Michael developed an annual
assessment template to streamline the reporting process for assessment information. The
standardized template provides structure to the assessment reporting process. Participants discussed at length the utilization of the template to report their department’s information to the senior leadership team. Michael and Madison appreciate the template approach because once they put each department’s report together, they have a product that can be shared with institutional constituents. This document is compiled annually and is made available for public viewing on the Division of Student Life website.

Madison acknowledged that her role in the operationalization of assessment practice is twofold: (a) to provide support and resources for Michael to be able to carry out his efforts, and (b) to publically articulate support for assessment practice and the charge she has bestowed upon Michael as the assessment champion. Sharing his thoughts on Madison’s support of Michael’s efforts, Curt stated, “It was important for people to hear from her that she’s expecting him to do this. So when he asks you for something, consider it from me. You know, I think it was really important for her to do that.”

Participants reported the assessment seminar and reporting structure made a significant impact on the practice of assessment in the division.

*Provide financial resources to support assessment.* Participants also acknowledged the importance of financial support of assessment practice within the division’s budget. Michael, Madison, and Courtney all emphasized the importance of providing adequate resources for staff members to practice assessment. In the 2013-2014 budget year, the SSAO allocated $14,450 to support the division’s assessment initiatives in the Division of Student Life. This funding supports the materials for the assessment seminar course (including text books and the end-of-seminar luncheon), WuFoo
instrumentation annual fee, and EBI Student Affairs Suite. Michael summarized his thoughts on providing adequate resources to support a culture of assessment by saying:

And I really do think it takes those multiple investments you have to make in the training, providing the tools and the resources, the support. You can’t just be thou shalt assess – go do it and report back to me.

Kade, a staff member in housing and residence life, noted the importance of utilizing national benchmarking tools, such as the EBI, to not only evaluate their programs, but see how the university compares on a national level with similar institutions. Kade shared that being able to utilize the EBI has helped his department recognize where some of their gaps in practice were so that improvements could be made. In addition to supporting assessment practice through the formal organizational structure and budget allocation, the SSAO also promoted assessment practice by encouraging a collaborative approach to assessment.

Encourage a collaborative approach to assessment practice. The participants in this study noted two strategies Madison has employed to build a collaborative approach to assessment practice in the division: (a) instituted cooperative opportunities for in-depth assessment, and (b) identified a network of colleagues to provide assessment support. Each year, several cross-functional committees conduct in-depth studies on two or three special topics or gaps as identified by divisional staff or the assessment data from the previous year. These teams provide the opportunity for staff to collaborate across departments. Madison reflected on why the committees are cross-functional by stating, “It’s because we want them to think fresh and think differently and to challenge each
other.” Staff members in the division perceive these teams as a benefit to their programs and services. William shared his thoughts on this process:

I think assessment is something that requires in-depth thinking, some in-depth planning, that if you weren’t running day to day it is very hard to do that. But now that we can have some interaction and some cooperation, some synergy, then I think we do it much better.

Collaboration on in-depth assessment projects is not the only collaborative strategy Madison has employed during her time as the SSAO. She has also developed an informal support network for assessment practice.

Identifying a network on colleagues to provide assessment support was one of the ways the SSAO promoted assessment practice within the division. Madison self-identified herself as a team builder. This attribute was supported by the participants’ perceptions of her. As requirements for assessment were put into place, Madison identified a team of assessment helpers within the division and encouraged staff members to work together. She shared her perspective on this collaboration by stating:

Some people are stars at it so you pair them up with somebody that’s not a star. And somebody that enjoys it, pair them up with somebody that doesn’t enjoy it and just see if you can get it done and knocked out.

This strategy was perceived by the student life participants as creating a nonthreatening environment. Shelby, a student life participant, shared her thoughts on having colleagues to call on when she needed help:
She was smart enough to know the different ones [staff members] in the division and the different gifts that they had would be excellent to serve on the committee that would be open to help you individually work on your template. Those who had those gifts were thrilled, I mean they were tickled, and those of us who didn’t were like thanking God, you know. But she has this, she has this ability to look at an individual and know strengths and weaknesses and how to blend the two so that one doesn’t feel, it was a partnership thing.

Other participants echoed Shelby’s comments and shared how thankful they were to have identified colleagues within the division that could help with the assessment process. This strategy employed by Madison helped to create a feeling of collegiality among the staff in the division in regard to assessment practice.

As evidenced by this section, establishing a supportive organizational infrastructure, which included (a) empowering a champion to operationalize assessment practice, (b) providing financial resources to support assessment, and (c) encouraging a collaborative approach to assessment practice, was perceived by the participants as a key way for the SSAO to promote assessment practice within the division. In the next section, the third theme regarding how the SSAO promotes assessment practice in the division, utilize assessment to inform practice, is discussed.

**Utilize Assessment Data to Inform Practice.** When discussing the SSAO’s role in promoting assessment practice, the participants emphasized the importance of Madison
utilizing the data to inform practice within the Division. When asked about Madison’s role in promoting assessment practice, Michael summarized his perspective by stating:

It’s not like I do all this work and that I, I’m speaking on behalf of all those who do assessment, it’s not like we do this, give it to her, and it just kind of, you never hear back, you never know what’s done with this. And so you actually see this information being used to make decisions at a cabinet level…programs are implemented or budgets are shifted around based on it. So, to me it’s more, her role is more of what’s done with data and it reinforces the need to do it because decisions are made using it. You know, we’ve made staffing decisions based on assessment data, budgetary decisions, changes in programs, orientation, so some significant things very visible things to the division. And we make sure then, and she does make sure that areas know, you know, the others know these decisions were made based on the data that was collected. So, it’s kind of closing the loop, I guess. I see that she makes the initial charge to the division that this is important, but she also kind of closes the loop with it so everyone knows it is indeed important because it is used.

Three subthemes emerged in regard to the SSAO’s role in utilizing data to inform practice within the division: (a) make data-driven decisions, (b) advocate for the division, and (c) strategically plan the future direction of the division. These three subthemes will be discussed throughout this section.
Make data-driven decisions. Data driven decision-making emerged as a theme when talking with participants about how Madison promoted assessment practice in the division. Participants in and outside of the division noted how persistent Madison was in requesting and utilizing data to inform decisions. In discussing the decision-making process, Michael noted:

What I will tell you is Madison is very detail-oriented. So, she’s not, you can’t just make a haphazard statement or make a claim about something without her saying how do we know that? Or, you know, what data do you have to support that? So, you know, she wants decisions to be data-driven.

The participants also noted the importance of making data-driven decisions visible to the division at large. They believed that if staff members in the division saw how the assessment data was used, it would further contribute to the understanding of why assessment is important to their work. Divisional staff members noted several changes that have occurred within the division since Madison’s arrival as a result of assessment data.

Throughout the interviews, the participants reflected on the decisions that have been made within the division based on assessment data. William reported that the decision to move freshman orientation to the summer was hugely dependent upon data. William and the senior leadership team utilized the data regarding orientation to completely overhaul how the program was run for incoming freshman. He went on to add that the program has been modified two more times since moving to the summer model because of assessment data that was collected. The room assignment process in housing
and residence life was also modified because of assessment data. Curt articulated that having the evidence to back up his reasoning for changing the process made it one of the easiest decisions he has ever made. Volunteer services, leadership programs, career services, diversity and inclusion programs all reported making changes that were data-driven and intended to enrich the student experience.

Student life and university participants were able to share changes that have been made in the division because of assessment data and acknowledged the SSAO’s role in utilizing assessment data to make decisions within the division. However, several participants expressed that they did not know how the data was used to make decisions. When asked how assessment data is used to make decisions within the Division of Student life, Lori responded:

You know, I am not aware yet of how it’s used. I feel that it, there’s a method to all of, you know, a method to this madness and there’s a, that’s the plan. I’m not real sure if that is happening.

The participants also highlighted the important role the SSAO plays in advocating for the division’s needs at the university level.

*Advocate for the division.* In describing Madison’s role in promoting assessment practice, the participants emphasized the importance of the SSAO advocating to the university on behalf of the division’s needs. Staff members voiced that Madison shared the division’s annual assessment report with institutional constituents, such as the president, the president’s cabinet, the chief academic officer, and the offices of admissions, development, and finance. Shelia, a new professional in the division, shared
her belief regarding Madison’s role in promoting a culture of assessment by saying, “I think that she’s got to go to our president and tell him what is happening in our division.”

Student life staff also emphasized the importance of the SSAO lobbying for resources to enhance divisional programs and services. Greg shared how the counseling center was able to benefit from Madison sharing assessment data with institutional leaders:

One of our major thrusts over the time that Madison has been here has been to grow the department in terms of the staff because we were, I think, under staffed for a university of our size and type. She has been advocating for us so I’m trying to feed her information that helps her make the case when it gets to those budget decisions about where we’re going to allocate resources. She’s been an effective voice for us and we’ve had good support from our President in terms of making some changes and growing. We’ve added new space because we were locked by not being able to grow because we didn’t have any more space for people in the office.

Staff members provided numerous examples of additional resources the division has received since Madison assumed the role of Vice President for Student Life. For example, the division was able to add a full-time staff member to oversee fraternity and sorority life and assist with the institution’s wealth of student organizations. Assessment data was also used to change the Alcohol and Drug Coordinator’s position from halftime to fulltime. These vivid changes within the Division of Student Life encouraged staff
members’ commitment to practice assessment. In addition to making data-driven decisions and advocating for the division, the participants in the study emphasized the role the SSAO plays in using assessment data to strategically plan the future direction of the division.

**Strategically plan the future direction of the division.** When asked how she would define student affairs assessment, Madison replied by saying:

> We have to strategically plan experiences that both complement the in-class learning, but are also learning in and of itself outside the class. And the assessment piece of that is determining whether or not those outcomes really do happen. That what we do actually makes a difference in a student’s learning and their experience and it is educationally purposeful. And so to me that is where, I think that’s where assessment intersects. You know, is what we’re doing educationally purposeful? And assessment helps us determine that and then gives us direction.

Madison’s use of the word strategic in her definition of student affairs assessment is indicative of her role in promoting assessment practice within the division. The participants, both in and out of the Division of Student Life, repeatedly described her as a methodical and systematic administrator. When asked how much time she spent on assessment, Madison reported that she spends a “tremendous amount of time in strategic planning that is highly dependent on assessment information.” She quantified her statement by stating that she spends approximately fifty percent of her time utilizing assessment information to strategically plan at both the divisional and institutional level.
Madison provided further details of the strategic planning process that takes place within the division and the institution in regard to short term and a long term planning.

At the divisional level, Madison thoroughly reads all of the assessment reports provided by the staff in the division. She takes notes on the reports, asks questions, and provides feedback to the staff that prepared them. She shared that she enjoys reading through all of the reports because “it helps me see the possibilities”. For short term planning, the assessment data allows her to see the gaps or problems in the division and provide feedback to improve practice. For long term planning, there is a team effort among the senior leadership, directors, associate directors, and assistant directors to determine a strategy for the future.

At the institutional level, Madison shares the assessment information with the president, the cabinet of the university, and the offices of admissions, development, and finance. She also shares the information with one of her closest colleagues on campus, Bill, the Vice President for Academic Affairs and Dean of Faculty. Together the two vice presidents utilize the assessment information to strategically plan the direction of their divisions. William, Michael, and several other participants noted throughout the study the close working relationship and collaborative nature of these two vice presidents. An example of their collaborative strategic planning rests in the development of the institution’s new student center. The programs and services offered in the student center are intentionally mixed between academic and student affairs. Bill offered his thoughts on the collaborative and strategic relationship between the two divisions:
Both she and I recognize that for students to have a successful collegiate experience that they are going to have to navigate their four years here at Randal University in a way that is not just simply two different experiences. Their academic experience and their student life experience. But there was a seamless, this is the term she and I always like to use, transition that they’re going through whether they are in the residence halls or whether they are in the classroom and that if we don’t think collaboratively about the outcomes that we want for a student, then we’re missing the opportunities that a residential college experience can bring to an undergraduate liberal arts degree. We’re a big village. Every one of us working on this campus will allow the student to grow and get those outcomes that we’re searching for….And having that communication and having that joint responsibility that will help craft our programs so that they complement one another….We see our collaboration as a way of strengthening each other’s programs and if we didn’t do that the academics would suffer, the residential experience would suffer, the whole college then is not as rich as it could be.

It was evident from the data that one of the SSAO’s primary roles in promoting assessment practice was to utilize the information collected through assessments to strategically plan at both the divisional and institutional level. Institutional and divisional planning did emerge as a motivator for the SSAO to commit to promoting assessment practice. Accreditation did not emerge as a motivator the SSAO’s commitment to
promote assessment practice. The Vice President of Student Life and student life and university participants shared that accreditation was not the primary reason why the division practiced assessment. The participants in the study shared their belief that the data being collected through their annual assessment process is very valuable in meeting the requirements of their accrediting body. This section has provided a summary of the evidence supporting the role the SSAO plays in promoting a culture of assessment by utilizing assessment data to inform practice. The SSAO at Randal University utilized assessment data to inform practice by (a) making data-driven decisions, (b) advocating for the division, and (c) strategically planning the future direction of the division.

As previously presented, the Vice President for Student Life was perceived by the participants as the spearhead for the culture of assessment in the Division of Student Life. Three themes emerged as to how the Vice President for Student Life spearheaded the practice of assessment: (a) readied the organization for evolution, (b) established a supportive organizational infrastructure, and (c) utilized assessment data to inform practice. The data also revealed three behavioral characteristics of the Vice President for Student Life that supported her efforts in promoting assessment practice: (a) relationship builder, (b) avid learner, and (c) strategic planner. Data supporting the emergence of these three behavioral characteristics will be presented in the next section.

**Behavioral Characteristics of the SSAO.** Several behavioral characteristics of the SSAO enabled her to promote and establish a divisional commitment to assessment practice. As the culture of assessment evolved in the division, participants articulated that
Madison was a relationship builder, an avid learner, and a strategic planner. These three behavioral characteristics of the SSAO are discussed in this section.

**Relationship builder.** As the participants described how the Vice President for Student Life promotes a culture of assessment within the division, building relationships emerged as a primary theme. All fifteen participants reflected on Madison’s capacity to build relationships. Participants articulated that Madison made an intentional effort to build relationships, both within the division and across the institution. Within the division, student life participants shared that Madison makes an effort to spend time getting to know her staff on a professional and a personal level. She frequently shares meals with staff members, demonstrates concern for their families, and attends their programs and events. Several participants reflected on Madison’s sense of humor. They shared that while she has an expectation for hard work and professionalism, she also opens the door for staff to have fun and laugh. Staff members also reported that Madison will often use humor as a way to lighten the mood in regard to assessment.

At the institutional level, participants reported that Madison was very intentional about building relationships with key university constituents. When she arrived at the institution, she sought out opportunities to build relationships with the various departments on campus, including academic affairs, admissions, development, and finance. She frequently meets with and engages key partners at the institution. Participants also perceived the SSAO as a team builder. She established several mechanisms, for example the special project teams and assessment coaches, to fuel collaboration and team work within the division. Participants recognized these initiatives
as a way for her to not only build relationships with staff, but to enable staff members to build relationships with one another. Outside of the division, she works very closely with her counterpart in academic affairs to develop ways in which academic affairs and student life can collaborate and complement one another.

Several excerpts from the data set illuminating Madison’s role as a relationship builder are provided in Table 4.7.

Table 4.7

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Excerpt</th>
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| William     | “It is something that our vice president brought in as a goal. That is to create a partnership with academic affairs”
|             | “She has proven that she’s a relationship builder.” |
| Greg        | “She’s effective in terms of her relationships with the various programs and understanding what’s going on with them, but then also effective when she’s relating that back out to the rest of the university.” |
| Courtney    | “Well she could have just gone in and done it herself and said, you know, this is what we’re doing, but she lets us give feedback or be a part of the process for whatever the change is. So, just feeling like you have some ownership in it, like she’s not just dictating that is what we’re going to do, but that you’re part of the process.” |
| Bill        | “Our faculty really admire Madison. In fact to the extent that they will invite Madison to have conversations with them about issues that they are dealing with, particularly interpersonal issues.” |
| Curt        | “She’s very, very approachable and, you know, I think that’s, she has a gift at, you know, at having found a way to open herself up for other people to approach and to feel connected to without being inappropriate. You know my custodial staff at times will just go visit her. That’s huge.”
|             | “You know one of the things she does is whenever anything comes up related to my department she calls me.” |
| Sheila      | “…she takes the time to see out entry-level employees on a personal level and I think that increases you know the respect that a lot of us
“I think she makes it a point to really get to know us. I mean we had lunch together yesterday with a group of people. So, I mean I think she, you know, really does make it a point to spend a lot of time with us. I think that’s the way we know she’s invested in us professional because I don’t interact with her a ton.”

**Shelby**

“She’s very relational and there’s not this hierarchy thing of you do it my way or no way blah blah blah, but she’s your partner.”

“Connie is the type if you make a mistake, you’ve made a mistake…and she will back you she will support you. And she’s not out to get you…but that’s how she did it just in relationships you know.”

**Lori**

“One of the first things I noticed she did and she is just smart in this way, she just kind of knew to come in and who around campus she should make friends with.”

“The chief financial officer, the chief development officer, a couple of high profile faculty, women, the Dean of Academic Affairs….She has really good relationships working relationships with all of these people. I think they have a lot of respect for her.”

**Madison**

“I like to get to know our staff. I try to understand them on an interpersonal level…”

“I try to engage others, I try to build a team. I’m team-oriented. I don’t like doing stuff all by myself.”

**Michael**

“We’re actually texting during ballgames at night and can you believe that play. She’s very much into sports. We have a connection there. She came out to my boys basketball game the other night and they call her Aunt Madison.”

**Morgan**

“She’s developed more of a team, a feeling of team…”

“Well she tries to find a time and her calendar is pretty hectic…where she goes to lunch with most of her reports on a regular basis. And it’s not necessarily, it’s not a business lunch, it’s just a hey one-on-one time, get to know you kind of thing.”

As demonstrated in Table 4.7, Madison assumes the role as a relationship builder within the Division of Student Life and across the institution. Her capacity to build relationships supported her efforts to promote assessment practice. The second behavioral
characteristic of the SSAO that emerged from the data set, avid learner, will be discussed in the next section.

**Avid learner.** Throughout the interviews, participants consistently shared that Madison is very detail-oriented and attentive to the operations of both the division and the institution. Madison’s role as an avid learner enabled her to promote assessment practice within the Division of Student Life. Numerous participants shared that Madison thoroughly reads all documentation that is provided to her. When participants were asked how they knew that she read everything, they shared that she will make comments, ask questions, give feedback, or bring the information up in conversation. Many participants described her as a “well-read” practitioner and commented on the large book collection in her office. She often will share articles and other scholarly works with divisional staff.

Madison was also described as being inquisitive. Staff reported that she routinely asks questions about the process, the program or service, and the outcome. She encourages staff to also be inquisitive about their own programs and services. Madison is quick to document the outcomes of a meeting and share action items with those who attended. Madison described her leadership style by stating, “I’m a learner in my style.” She actively seeks opportunities to learn about the people, the process, and the practice within the division and the institution. The third behavioral characteristic of the SSAO that emerged from the data set, strategic planner, will be discussed in the next section.

**Strategic planner.** The third behavioral characteristic, strategic planner, was highlighted as a way the SSAO promotes a culture of assessment in the division. The participants described the SSAO as “strategic”, “methodical”, and “forward-thinking”.

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Participants perceived the development of assessment practice within the division as a strategic process. The staff recognized that Madison phased in the practice and utilization of assessment over time. They described the way in which she modified the organizational structure to provide support and accountability for assessment practice. Participants recognized that she models informed and intentional decision-making and encourages the same behavior in her staff.

Participants outside of the division described her as an administrator that “looks at the big picture” of the university and how student life programs and services play a role in the student experience. Her counterpart in academic affairs explained that she thinks holistically about what is best for the student and how the institution can enrich their experience. Participants’ perceptions of Madison were congruent with how she described herself as the SSAO.

Summary

This chapter has provided a summary of the data collected in this study of the Vice President for Student Life’s role in promoting the practice of assessment in the Division of Student Life at Randal University. The participants in this study perceived the SSAO as the spearhead of the assessment culture in the division. As evidenced in the data from this study, three themes emerged as the participants described how the SSAO promotes assessment practice in the division: (a) ready the organization for evolution, (b) establish a supportive organizational infrastructure, and (c) utilize assessment data to inform practice. Three behavioral characteristics of the Vice President for Student Life that supported her efforts in promoting a culture of assessment also emerged from the
data set: (a) relationship builder, (b) avid learner, and (c) strategic planner. A summary of the data supporting each of these emergent themes was provided in this chapter. The next chapter provides a summary and discussion of the study’s findings, implications for practice, and considerations for future research.
CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Provided in this chapter is a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, and recommendations for practice and future research. The chapter begins with an overview of the study and a summary of the findings. Following the summary, a discussion of the findings is presented. The chapter concludes with implications for practice and recommendations for future research.

Summary of the Study

Numerous scholars have emphasized the crucial role of the SSAO in establishing and developing a culture of assessment in the division of student affairs (Banta et al., 2009; Busby & Robinson, 2012; Sandeen & Barr, 2006; Seagraves & Dean, 2010). While the SSAO has been identified in the literature as a significant contributor to a divisional culture of assessment, further investigation of how the SSAO promotes assessment practice is warranted. The purpose of study was to examine the role of the SSAO in promoting a culture of assessment in the Division of Student Life at Randal University. The following primary research question guided this study:

- How does the SSAO promote a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University?

The secondary research questions listed below also guided the investigation:

- How does the SSAO establish commitment from divisional staff members to engage in student affairs assessment?
• How do divisional staff members describe the role of the SSAO in promoting assessment practice within the division?

• What role does institutional planning and accreditation play in the SSAO’s commitment to promote assessment practice within the division of student life?

A single case study design was employed to examine the primary and secondary research questions.

Data sources for this single case study included interviews, documents, and researcher notes. The study included 15 Randal University employees (13 staff members from the Division of Student Life and two employees from the university). Semi-structured interviews were conducted in person on the university campus. All interviews were audio recorded and transcribed. Requested documents were collected from the senior leadership team in the Division of Student Life. Transcripts, documents, and researcher notes were loaded into NVivo10 for analysis.

A four phase process was employed for data analysis: (a) organizing and preparing data for analysis; (b) coding transcripts, documents, and researcher notes; (c) interrelating themes/descriptions; and (d) data interpretation (Creswell, 2009). Analysis of the data revealed that the SSAO was perceived by the participants as the spearhead of the assessment culture in the division. The participants emphasized the importance of the SSAO in leading the charge for staff to practice assessment. Participants in the Division of Student Life reported that if the Vice President for Student Life did not expect that staff members practice assessment, it would not be a prevalent component of their work.
The participants’ perception of the SSAO as the spearhead for the culture of assessment supports the need to explore the primary research question of this study: how does the SSAO promote a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University?

Developing a culture of assessment in the Division of Student Life at Randal University has been an evolutionary process. Three themes emerged as the participants in this study described the role of the SSAO in promoting assessment practice in the division: (a) ready the organization for evolution, (b) establish a supportive organizational infrastructure, and (c) utilize assessment data to inform practice. The first theme, ready the organization for evolution, articulated how the SSAO readied the organization to undergo a sustainable transformation. The SSAO first assessed the current understanding and practice of assessment in the division. It was important for her to get to know her staff and their programs, understand how assessment was currently used within the division, and determine the gaps in assessment practice. The SSAO had to understand where the division was in their understanding and utilization of assessment in order to further grow the practice.

To further develop the practice of assessment in the division, the SSAO encouraged staff to challenge the status quo. Madison asked divisional staff to consider if there was a better or more effective way to deliver a program or service to students. She questioned how staff knew that their programs were effective or successful. Through asking these hard pointed questions, she made them recognize the need to have a
rationale behind the delivery of their programs and services. As she continued to ready the organization for evolution, the SSAO defined the expectation of assessment practice.

In order to define the expectation for assessment practice, the SSAO worked with divisional staff members to develop a philosophy of assessment practice for the division. Through this statement, Madison made it clear that assessment needed to become a consistent part of the division’s practice. She publically and privately communicated the expectation for assessment practice and set annual assessment goals for the division to accomplish. As the staff in the Division of Student Life became more and more comfortable with assessment, the SSAO worked to establish a supportive organizational infrastructure, the second emergent theme of the study.

The SSAO recognized the need to establish a supportive organizational infrastructure in order to ensure accountability for assessment practice within the division. Madison empowered a champion, Michael, to operationalize the practice of assessment. The SSAO charged Michael with the task of establishing a formal annual assessment and reporting process and developing the capacity of the professional staff to practice assessment. Michael operationalized assessment practice through developing an annual timeline for assessment planning, implementation, and reporting. Madison also supported the operationalization of assessment practice in the division by providing financial resources to support assessment. Lastly, Madison encouraged a collaborative approach to assessment through cross-functional assessment teams and identifying a network of colleagues to provide assessment support. In addition to establishing a
supportive organizational infrastructure, the participants emphasized the important role of the SSAO in utilizing assessment data to inform practice.

The third theme, utilize assessment data to inform practice, emphasizes the role of the SSAO in making data-driven decision, advocating for the division, and strategically planning the future direction of the division. The participants perceived data-driven decision making as a way in which the SSAO promotes the practice of assessment in the division. By demonstrating the utilization of assessment data in decision-making, staff members visibly see how the assessment process can enhance, change, or revamp their programs and services.

Participants also emphasized the important role the SSAO plays in advocating for the division’s needs based on assessment data. The participants believed that as the voice of the division to the university, the SSAO is responsible for sharing assessment information with institutional constituents and lobbying for the resources needed to enhance student life programs and services. Lastly, the participants articulated the important role the SSAO has in utilizing assessment information to inform the future direction of the division.

In the Division of Student Life at Randal University, the Vice President for Student Life promoted a culture of assessment by (a) readying the organization for evolution, (b) establishing a supportive organizational infrastructure, and (c) utilizing assessment data to inform practice. As the participants described how the SSAO promoted and established a commitment to assessment practice in the division, it became
evident that three behavioral characteristics of the Vice President for Student Life supported her efforts: (a) relationship builder, (b) avid learner, and (c) strategic planner.

The participants in the study perceived the SSAO as a relationship builder. The data revealed that the SSAO made an intentional effort to build relationships with divisional staff and colleagues at the institution. The participants reported that Madison made an effort to get to know them on both a professional and interpersonal level. Her team-oriented style allowed her to build collegiality within the division and across the institution. The second behavioral characteristic, avid learner, allowed her to stay up-to-date with the happenings of the division. The participants described her as well-read, an active listener, and inquisitive. It was reported that Madison consistently provides feedback to staff and follows up on the projects within the division.

The third behavioral characteristic, strategic planner, demonstrates the SSAO’s forward-thinking approach to student life practice. The participants in the study described Madison as “strategic”, “methodical”, and “intentional”. Madison shared that she uses assessment data to see the possibilities and opportunities for the future direction of the Division of Student Life. Participants reported that she consistently uses assessment to make intentional and informed decisions about the direction of the division. The three behavioral characteristics, relationship builder, avid learner, and strategic planner, all supported the SSAO’s efforts in promoting a culture of assessment in the division.

This section has provided a summary of the study. An overview of the purpose, primary and secondary research questions, the case study methodology, and the emergent themes were presented. The next section of this chapter is a discussion of the findings.
Discussion of the Findings

“It was funny watching us step off the pier and get into the boat. We didn’t know if we were going to sink or swim. 90% of us thought we were going to sink. We all had lifejackets thinking we are just going to talk her out of this. We’re just not going to do this. We’re going to get together. We’re going to have a meeting, you know.”

– Shelby, Student Life Participant

The following primary research question guided this case study: How does the SSAO promote a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University? At Randal University, the Vice President for Student Life was perceived as the spearhead of the culture of assessment within the division. Her role as the SSAO was viewed as a supportive and necessary force for the practice of assessment in the division. Staff members reported that assessment would not be practiced routinely or in every department if the SSAO did not make it a priority for and expectation of the division. This finding is congruent with scholarly publications on assessment in student affairs. Support from the SSAO is one of the key points in the literature regarding conditions supportive of a culture of assessment in student affairs (ACPA, 2013; Busby & Robinson, 2012; Seagraves & Dean, 2010).

As the spearhead for the practice of assessment in the division, the Vice President for Student Life at Randal University acted as a catalyst for change. While she has greatly evolved the practice of assessment in the division over the past six years, she did not change the culture overnight. She methodically paced the infiltration of assessment practice into the division’s routine practice. Greg, a student life participant, labeled the process as “titrating the dose.” Madison recognized the need to understand where the division was in regard to assessment practice. She took into account their educational
background, experiences, and current practice in order to gage their understanding of assessment. She built relationships with her staff as she learned about their programs and services.

Through building relationships, she earned the trust of most of the staff as she readied the division for change. She asked questions about programs and services that made staff stop and think about their programs and services and why they did things the way they did them. She did not approach staff in an arrogant way, but in a way that complimented the work they were currently doing and challenged them to take it to the next level. The relationships she built with her staff allowed her to introduce a topic that was intimidating and unfamiliar for the majority of the division, especially the longtime staff members. She made sure they knew they were not doing anything wrong, only that there might be a way they could do it better. While this was the perception of most of the staff, one participant did articulate feeling as though they had to prove the value of their programs and services.

Congruent with the literature, the SSAO worked with staff members to develop an assessment philosophy statement. Busby and Robinson (2010) recommended the development of a division wide vision for assessment when developing a culture of assessment. The SSAO at Randal University took this strategy a step further by publically announcing the vision statement on the Division of Student Life website as a subset of the division’s mission statement. Aligning the vision for assessment with the divisional mission statement demonstrates that assessment information informs divisional practice.
Throughout the study, the participants commented on how persistent the SSAO was in making sure that decisions were data-driven.

Madison continuously asked questions about the how and why of the division’s programs and services. She created a system of accountability where staff members recognized that assessment data was going to be used to inform practice in the division. This strategy is also supported in the literature. Bresciani (2006) noted the importance of institutional leaders developing trust through demonstrating consistency in regard to evidence-based decision-making. The participants in the study expressed the emphasis Madison placed on utilizing data to make informed and intentional decisions.

As a catalyst for evolving the culture of assessment, the Vice President of Student Life used two strategies to develop a collegiality and support. She introduced the utilization of cross-functional project teams to conduct in-depth studies on important issues in the division each year. This strategy allowed staff members to develop relationships with one another, challenge one another, and utilize assessment to plan the future direction of the division. She also introduced a small support system for practicing assessment. As she learned the strengths and weaknesses of her staff, she identified a group of professional staff that could assist others with assessment. Developing a support team for assessment allowed the staff members that were not familiar with assessment to have a resource for help if they needed it. Developing a collegial work environment has been identified in the literature as a condition that supports a culture of assessment (Seagraves & Dean, 2010).
Along with developing interpersonal support systems, the SSAO also developed an organizational infrastructure supportive of a culture of assessment. The SSAO promoted assessment practice by empowering a champion of assessment, supporting the development of an extensive assessment professional development seminar, and providing financial support. The assessment seminar is a highly developed program that educates staff about different types of assessment, learning outcomes, instrumentation, sampling, data collection, data analysis, and writing reports. This unique opportunity allows staff members to understand the full scope of assessment and why it is important to their work. Staff members are given numerous books to build their scholarly library and to use as a reference once the seminar is over. Faculty and staff from other departments around campus have also been able to participate in the course.

The SSAO has invested a significant amount of resources to the development of a vibrant culture of assessment. The SSAO has allocated funds to support assessment practice in the division. The division provides the resources for the seminar course, online assessment instruments, and national benchmarking surveys. The SSAO has demonstrated to the division that assessment is a priority and that she is going to provide the resources to support it.

Throughout her time at Randal University, Madison has proven a commitment to promote assessment practice within the Division of Student Life. As illustrated in Figure 4.2, Madison guided the division through an evolutionary process in order to promote divisional assessment practice. This figure was presented using a linear framework in order to demonstrate the progression of assessment practice in the Division of Student
Life. This progression is not demonstrated utilizing a circular framework because Madison had to take into account the diverse experiences of her staff in regard to experience with assessment. Madison considered staff members’ educational attainment, professional background, time at the institution, and understanding of assessment in order to evolve assessment practice in the division as a whole.

Prior to conducting this study I developed a model for assessment culture in student affairs, which was presented in Figure 2.1. In this model, a circular framework with the SSAO as the focal point was utilized to demonstrate the influence of the SSAO in promoting a culture of assessment in the division. Throughout the course of this study, the data revealed the need to focus on how the SSAO promoted assessment practice within the student affairs division. Examining the role of the SSAO through a practical lens provided the opportunity to see how the assessment culture in the division was established. Starting with an exploration of how assessment practice evolved over time led to an understanding of the assessment culture within the division.

**Implications for Practice**

Provided in this section is a discussion of the implications this study has for practice in higher education. While the research design of this study does not allow for generalization to the larger population (Glesne, 2011), the data revealed several strategies for SSAOs to consider when promoting assessment practice within the division of student affairs. The following ways the SSAO can promote assessment practice in the division are discussed in this section: (a) spearhead the assessment initiative within the division; (b) provide capacity-building opportunities; (c) develop divisional guidelines for
assessment planning, implementation, and reporting; (d) provide financial support for assessment practice; (e) close the loop; and (f) develop policies and procedures for the sustainable practice of assessment.

**Spearhead the assessment initiative within the division.** Congruent with the literature regarding the SSAO and a divisional assessment culture (Busby & Robinson, 2012; Maki, 2004), the SSAO in this study was perceived as the spearhead of assessment practice in the division. Student affairs divisions seeking to develop a culture of evidence need to recognize the importance of endorsement and support for assessment practice from the SSAO. SSAOs need to publically and clearly communicate the expectation for assessment practice, consistently discuss assessment initiatives, and employ data-driven decision making.

SSAOs should also consider working with the division to organically develop a philosophy statement about assessment practice in the division. Working with the division to develop a philosophy statement about assessment practice helps divisional staff know the expectations for practice, feel ownership of the process, and develop commitment to the division’s goals in regard to assessment. Displaying the philosophy statement publically on the division’s website creates a system of accountability both with the institution and the general public. SSAOs working to develop and sustain a culture of assessment should also consider providing divisional staff with capacity-building opportunities.

**Provide capacity-building opportunities.** The senior leadership team in the Division of Student Life at Randal University shared their belief that the division’s
administration needs to educate staff regarding assessment practice. SSAOs need to consider the skill set of their division. It is important to recognize that each staff member has different educational backgrounds, length of time since degree completion, professional development experiences, and varying lengths of time at the institution. The SSAO should provide the division with capacity-building opportunities in regard to assessment that appropriately evolves practice.

At Randal University, the assessment seminar was one of the biggest ways in which the Division of Student Life supported divisional assessment practice. SSAOs should consider developing an assessment professional development seminar that educates divisional staff about the following:

- Purpose and importance of assessment practice in student affairs and higher education
- Student learning outcomes
- Various types of assessment and how assessment data can be used
- Assessment design and instrumentation
- Assessment data reporting and utilization

Along with the educational seminar, SSAOs should consider providing resources to each staff member regarding assessment practice, such as educational texts on assessment. If the division cannot allocate funds to purchase educational resources for each staff member, the SSAO should consider creating an assessment library in a common area where student affairs staff can refer to assessment resources. In addition to educating
student affairs staff regarding assessment practice, SSAO’s should consider developing formal guidelines for assessment planning, implementation, and reporting.

**Develop divisional guidelines for assessment planning, implementation, and reporting.** When asked what prohibited the staff in the Division of Student Life at Randal University from practicing assessment, many of the staff members reported constraints on their time limited what they were able to do in regard to assessment. Given the busy life of the average student affairs professional, SSAOs should consider developing divisional guidelines for assessment planning, implementation, and reporting. Providing a timeline for staff members to follow throughout the year communicates the expectation of assessment practice and creates a formal system of accountability. Staff members should be reminded of the deadlines and held accountable to them. This timeline should be consistent from year to year in order to perpetuate a routine assessment process.

Another strategy for making assessment practice easier on divisional staff is to provide a reporting template for assessment data. As it did in the Division of Student Life at Randal University, this template can serve two functions: (a) provide a mechanism for divisional staff to report their annual assessment data to the senior administration team, and (b) departmental reports can be put together to create a visually appealing and informative annual report for the division. Making the assessment reporting process easier for divisional staff to complete reduces the amount of time that staff must spend developing their own assessment report. The annual report detailing assessment initiatives throughout the division is a helpful product for the SSAO to share with...
institutional constituents and stakeholders as he/she advocates for the needs of the division. The SSAO should also consider sharing the annual assessment report on the division’s website as this demonstrates accountability to the students, institution, and the public.

**Provide financial support for assessment practice.** SSAOs should consider allocating financial resources to assessment practice in the division’s budget. By providing financial resources to assessment practice, the SSAO again communicates the expectation for and importance of assessment practice in the division. Financial resources should only be allocated if the need is warranted within the division. Financial support can fund resources such as the following:

- Assessment seminar materials
  - Room booking fees for meetings
  - Reference guides for seminar participants
  - Assessment seminar completion rewards/incentives
  - Expert guest speakers
- Benchmarking resources
- Instrumentation software (such as WuFoo, Survey Monkey, Fluid Surveys, etc.)
- Annual report design and printing
- Personal and departmental incentives and rewards for practicing assessment
• Student incentives and rewards for participating in divisional assessments

• Assessment professional development opportunities for staff (such as the ACPA Assessment Institute)

The participants in this study noted that there were not any significant incentives for practicing assessment and expressed a desire to see the division create more reward opportunities. SSAOs should consider developing incentives for further professional development related to assessment and programmatic development. In addition to providing financial support for assessment practice in the division, the SSAO should work to demonstrate the utilization of assessment data at the divisional and institutional level.

**Close the loop.** A resounding theme from this study was the need for the SSAO to close the loop in assessment practice. SSAOs need to demonstrate how assessment data is used within the division to make decisions. If staff members are unable to see how assessment data is used and how it is meaningful to their work as a practitioner, commitment to practice assessment will be difficult to sustain within the division. The SSAO should utilize one-on-one meetings, divisional staff meetings, and electronic communications to publically and privately share with the entire division how assessment data is being used at the divisional and institutional level to improve and change daily practice.

As the administrative head of the division, the SSAO also has a responsibility to advocate for the needs of the division at the institutional level. SSAOs should consider
developing a process for sharing annual assessment data with key institutional constituents such as the president, president’s cabinet, academic affairs, admissions, development, and institutional research based on the needs of the division. The annual assessment report compiled by Randal University’s Division of Student Life is a great example of how this exercise can be carried out. As the spearhead of the assessment culture in the division, the SSAO needs to ensure the assessment data is shared and that the gaps identified through assessments are addressed.

Another important factor in closing the loop is celebrating the assessment efforts of the student affairs staff. Student life participants in this study articulated the need for the senior administration to celebrate their success in regard to assessment and create opportunities for sharing methods for assessment practice in the division. Celebration of assessment practice can be carried out in a number of ways. The SSAO can develop a formal reward structure, such as programmatic or travel grants tied to assessment practice, and/or an informal reward structure, such as a monthly staff spotlight on assessment practice. Such initiatives would allow for staff to share how they are practicing assessment, which also provides a professional development opportunity for their colleagues, and builds collegiality in regard to practicing assessment.

**Develop policies and procedures for the sustainable practice of assessment.**

The SSAO must consider ways to sustain assessment practice in the division. If the SSAO embraces the role of spearheading the divisional assessment initiative, as observed in this case study, policies and procedures of the division need to be modified and developed to sustain assessment practice past the tenure of the SSAO. The SSAO should
consider empowering a champion of assessment within the division. Given the demands and time constraints of the SSAO, an assessment champion will aid the division in operationalizing and sustaining assessment practice in the division. The champion’s responsibility to perpetuate assessment should be included in the individual’s formal position description.

Assessment practice should also be embedded into the policies and procedures of the division. Job descriptions for all divisional staff should be updated to include assessment practice. The annual evaluation process should reflect an assessment component in order to hold staff members accountable for practicing assessment. Assessment initiatives should also be built into the division’s strategic plan, both short-term and long-term. The annual reporting process should also include assessment data from each department.

Sustaining the practice of assessment should also be considered when hiring new staff members in the division. SSAOs should consider making assessment knowledge and/or experience one of the requirements of the position. Building a divisional team with a strong knowledge base and experience in assessment will help build and sustain the assessment culture. Regardless of experience with assessment, all new employees should be required to complete an assessment seminar and orientation to the practice of assessment in the division. Including assessment practice in the orientation process for new employees will help send the message that assessment is a priority within the division.
As student affairs divisions look to establish and sustain a culture of assessment, the role of the SSAO is crucial. SSAOs need to consider the unique composition of their division and institutional context to determine the most effective way to develop assessment practice. SSAOs’ need to recognize the vital role they play in spearheading the divisional assessment initiative, providing capacity building opportunities and resources for assessment practice, and utilizing assessment data to advocate for the division. This section has provided an overview of the implications this study has for practice in higher education. The next section of this chapter discusses recommendations for future research.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Given the single case study research design for this study, a more extensive investigation should be carried out to further explore the ways in which SSAOs promote assessment practice in student affairs divisions. This study and the scholarly literature highlight the importance of the SSAO in supporting a culture of assessment. However, the literature is scarce in regard to action strategies that SSAOs can employ to promote assessment practice.

The evolution of the culture of assessment at Randal University perpetuates curiosity regarding assessment culture building. Further studies should be conducted to explore the evolution of a culture of assessment. A multi-site, mixed methods study could be conducted to explore how assessment practice evolved within the division of student affairs. A more refined model of the evolutionary process would be helpful for SSAOs.
and institutional leaders looking to develop a culture of assessment at their own institutions.

The behavioral characteristics of the SSAO, relationship builder, avid learner, and strategic planner, present an interesting opportunity for future research. A quantitative study of a national sample of SSAOs could be conducted to explore how these three behavioral characteristics support the SSAOs efforts in promoting a culture of assessment. Further identifying how these characteristics enable the SSAO to effectively promote a culture of assessment would be valuable for leadership development in the field.

As indicated in this study, the SSAO empowered a champion to operationalize assessment within the division. Given the decentralized nature of the assessment process at the institution, further research on how the champion of assessment cultivates assessment practice in a decentralized versus centralized process would be beneficial. A quantitative study exploring the behavioral characteristics and culture building strategies of the assessment champion from both centralized and decentralized processes would provide a unique contrast of how these two processes differ on college and university campuses.

Additionally, a qualitative study exploring how educational and professional experiences influence the SSAOs decision to spearhead assessment practice in the division of student affairs would be beneficial. Understanding the professional experiences and educational background of SSAOs who are successful in promoting a culture of assessment would greatly contribute to the literature. As graduate preparation
programs educate the future leadership of the profession, it is important to understand the skills necessary to promote assessment practice.

This chapter provided a summary of the study, discussion of the findings, implications for practice, and recommendations for future research. The chapter begins with an overview of the study and a summary of the findings. Following the summary, a discussion of the findings is presented. The chapter concludes with implications for practice and recommendations for future research.
APPENDICES
Appendix A

IRB Letter of Approval for Pilot Study

May 28, 2013

Dr. Tony W. Cawthon
Clemson University
Department of Leadership, Counselor Education,
Human and Organizational Development
211B Tillman Hall
Clemson, SC 29634

SUBJECT: IRB Protocol # IRB2013-166, entitled "The Senior Student Affairs Officer and the Culture of Assessment in Student Affairs"

Dear Dr. Cawthon:

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) of Clemson University reviewed the above-mentioned study using Expedited review procedures and has recommended approval. Approval for this study has been granted as of May 28, 2013. Please find enclosed with this letter your original stamped consent documents to be used with this protocol.

Your approval period is May 28, 2013 to May 27, 2014. Your continuing review is scheduled for April 2014. Please refer to the IRB number and title in communication regarding this study. Please note that the Principal Investigator is responsible for maintaining all signed consent forms (if applicable) for at least three (3) years after completion of the study.

No change in this approved research protocol can be initiated without the IRB's approval. This includes any proposed revisions or amendments to the protocol or consent form. Any unanticipated problems involving risk to subjects, any complications, and/or any adverse events must be reported to the Office of Research Compliance immediately. Please contact the office if your study has terminated or been completed before the identified review date.

The Clemson University IRB is committed to facilitating ethical research and protecting the rights of human subjects. Please contact the Office of Research Compliance at 656-6460 if you have any questions.

Sincerely,

Laura A. Moll, M.A., CIP
IRB Administrator

Enclosures
Appendix B

Participant Recruitment: Email to the Senior Student Affairs Officer

My name is Lindsey Ridgeway and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership (Higher Education) program at Clemson University. Under the advisement of my dissertation committee chair, Tony Cawthon, I would like to conduct a study to explore the Senior Student Affairs Officer’s role in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Affairs.

I am contacting you to inquire about your willingness to participate in this study. I would like to interview you and your staff about the role you have played in creating a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University. I would also like to collect documents pertaining to divisional assessment to review. Potential documents for analysis include, but are not limited to, the following: Student Life organization chart, Student Life strategic plan, divisional annual reports, reports prepared for or submitted to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, Student Life publications, memos from the SSAO, professional development materials, and division/departmental reports.

I would like to audio record the interviews. If you are not comfortable with the interview being audio recorded, it will not affect the interview. Your participation will be needed several times throughout the duration of the study. An initial interview should last approximately one hour to one and a half hours. Additional follow-up interviews, lasting approximately one hour, could be needed as the study progresses. The information provided will remain strictly confidential and you will not be identified by your answers. Your name will not be disclosed in any way.

Data will be compiled as a whole with no individual responses tied to your name or any identifying information about you. All information disclosed during the interview will be kept in a secure location. If you are interested, contact information for all of the research team members can be provided to you.

I believe Randal’s Division of Student Life provides an excellent example of how assessment can be integrated into practitioners’ daily work and the Senior Student Affairs Officer’s role in cultivating this practice. Please let me know if you would be willing to participate in the research study.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.
Appendix C

Participant Recruitment: Email to the Division of Student Life Staff

My name is Lindsey Ridgeway and I am a doctoral student in the Educational Leadership (Higher Education) program at Clemson University. Under the advisement of my dissertation committee chair, Tony Cawthon, I would like to conduct a case study to explore the Senior Student Affairs Officer’s role in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Affairs.

I am contacting you to inquire about your willingness to participate in this study. I would like to interview you about the role the Vice President for Student Life has played in creating a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life at Randal University. I would like to audio record the interview. If you are not comfortable with the interview being audio recorded, it will not affect the interview. Your participation will only be needed once for an interview that should last approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. The information provided will remain strictly confidential and you will not be identified by your answers. Your name will not be disclosed in any way.

Data will be compiled as a whole with no individual responses tied to your name or any identifying information about you. All information disclosed during the interview will be kept in a secure location. If you are interested, contact information for all of the research team members can be provided to you.

I believe Randal’s Division of Student Life provides an excellent example of how assessment can be integrated into practitioners’ daily work and the Senior Student Affairs Officer’s role in cultivating this practice. Please let me know if you would be willing to participate in the research study.

Thank you in advance for your time and consideration.
Appendix D

Pilot Study Debriefing Statement and Interview Protocol

Please keep in mind that your participation in this study is voluntary. I can supply you with contact information regarding this study upon request. My name is Lindsey Ridgeway and I am a Clemson doctoral student. The purpose of this study is to explore the Senior Student Affairs Officer’s (SSAO) role in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Affairs at Randal University.

I am interested in your experience with assessment at Randal University and your perception of the Vice President for Student Life’s role in cultivating a culture of assessment within the Division. Your participation will only be needed once for several questions that should last approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. The information provided will remain strictly confidential and you will not be identified by your answers. Your name will not be disclosed in any way.

Data will be compiled as a whole with no individual responses tied to your name or any identifying information about you. All information disclosed during the interview will be kept in a secure location. Would it be alright if I audiotaped our interview? Saying no to audio recording will have no effect on the interview. You may choose not to answer any question or to discontinue the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview Questions – Division of Student Life Staff Members

1. What is your role within the Division of Student Life?
   a. What are the duties and responsibilities associated with this position?
   b. How long have you been an employee within the Division of Student Life?
   c. What is your educational background?
2. How would you define student affairs assessment?
   a. What specific experiences, development opportunities, and/or research have shaped your definition?
3. Please tell me about the practice of assessment within your department.
   a. What is required of you, given your position within the Division of Student Life, in regard to assessment?
   b. How do you feel about conducting assessment(s)?
   c. On average, how much of your time is devoted to assessment?
      i. Is this outlined in your position description?
ii. To what extent does the practice of assessment influence your annual performance evaluation?

4. What role do you believe the Vice President for Student Life plays in promoting assessment within the Division of Student Life?
   a. What experiences have informed your perception?

5. How does the Vice President for Student Life promote the utilization of assessment within your department and throughout the Division of Student Life?
   a. Are there any professional development opportunities offered within the Division of Student Life in regard to assessment?
   b. Are there any incentives for you or your department for conducting assessments?

**Interview Questions – Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO)**

1. What is your role within the Division of Student Life?
   a. What are the duties and responsibilities associated with this position?
   b. How long have you been an employee within the Division of Student Life?
   c. What is your educational background?

2. How would you define student affairs assessment?
   a. What specific experiences, development opportunities, and/or research have shaped your definition?

3. What is your philosophy regarding assessment within the Division of Student Life?
   a. What level of assessment is required from each department?
   b. How is the information collected through assessments disseminated throughout the institution?
   c. Are there any professional development opportunities for employees offered within the Division of Student Life in regard to assessment?
   d. Are there any incentives for the Student Life departments or for individual employees for conducting assessments?

4. What role do you believe that you, as the Vice President for Student Life, play in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life?
   a. What experiences have informed your belief?
   b. On average, how much of your time is devoted to assessment?
      i. Is this outlined in your position description?
      ii. To what extent does the practice of assessment influence your annual performance evaluation?
Appendix E

Debriefing Statement and Interview Protocol

Please keep in mind that your participation in this study is voluntary. I can supply you with contact information regarding this study upon request. My name is Lindsey Ridgeway and I am a Clemson doctoral student. The purpose of this study is to explore the Senior Student Affairs Officer’s (SSAO) role in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Affairs at Randal University.

I am interested in your experience with assessment at Randal University and your perception of the Vice President for Student Life’s role in cultivating a culture of assessment within the Division. Your participation will only be needed once for several questions that should last approximately forty-five minutes to one hour. The information provided will remain strictly confidential and you will not be identified by your answers. Your name will not be disclosed in any way.

Data will be compiled as a whole with no individual responses tied to your name or any identifying information about you. All information disclosed during the interview will be kept in a secure location. Would it be alright if I audiotaped our interview? Saying no to audio recording will have no effect on the interview. You may choose not to answer any question or to discontinue the interview at any time.

Do you have any questions before we get started?

Interview Questions – Division of Student Life Staff Members

Section I – Participants Role within the Division of Student Life at Randal University

1. Please tell me about your role within the Division of Student Life at Randal University.
   a. What is your formal position within the Division of Student Life?
   b. What are the duties and responsibilities associated with this position?
   c. How long have you been an employee within the Division of Student Life?
   d. What is your educational background?
      i. Did you have any formal assessment training as part of your preparation?
   e. How would you define student affairs assessment?
      i. What specific experiences, development opportunities, education, and/or research have shaped your definition?
f. What effect, if any, has the current Vice President for Student Life had on how you define and understand assessment practice in student affairs?

Section II – Departmental Assessment Practice within the Division of Student Life

2. Please tell me about the role and practice of assessment within your department.
   c. What is the purpose of practicing assessment within your department?
   d. What is required of you, given your position within the Division of Student Life, in regard to assessment?
   e. Have you practiced assessment within your department?
      i. Why or why not?
   f. How do you feel about conducting assessment(s)?
      i. Why do you feel this way?
   g. On average, how much of your time is devoted to assessment?
      i. Is this outlined in your position description?
      ii. To what extent does the practice of assessment influence your annual performance evaluation?
   h. What promotes and/or inhibits your ability practice assessment?
      i. How is assessment data used to make decisions within the department?
         i. Who is a part of the decision-making process?
         ii. Please provide an example of a time when assessment data was used to make a decision within the Division.
      j. What influence, if any, has the SSAO had on your commitment to practice assessment?

Section III – Assessment Practice within the Division of Student Life

3. How do you think assessment is understood within the Division of Student Life?
   a. To what extent does the Division of Student Life reflect a culture of assessment? (i.e., A culture of assessment refers to a commitment among student affairs professionals to utilize data to demonstrate how their programs and services are effective and contribute to the institution’s ability to fulfill its mission (Culp, 2012).)
   b. To what extent is assessment practice valued within the Division of Student Life? Within the institution?
      i. How do you know?

4. To what extent is assessment data used to make decisions within the Division of Student Life?
   a. Who is a part of the decision-making process?
b. Please provide an example of a time when assessment data was used to make a decision within the Division.

5. What role does accreditation play in the Division’s commitment to practice assessment?
   a. What is your involvement with accreditation in regard to assessment?

Section IV – Role of the Vice President for Student Life

6. How would you describe the leadership of the Vice President for Student Life?
   a. If you report directly to the Vice President for Student Life, how would you describe her as a supervisor?
      i. What are some components you change if you could?

7. What role do you believe the Vice President for Student Life plays in creating and sustaining a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life?
   a. What experiences have informed your perception?

8. To what extent, if any, does the Vice President for Student Life promote the practice of assessment within your department? Throughout the Division of Student Life?
   a. What specific actions (if any) of the Vice President for Student Life demonstrate her commitment to a divisional culture of assessment?
   b. What organizational strategies have been put in place by the Vice President for Student Life to promote assessment practice?
      i. Are there any professional development opportunities offered within the Division of Student Life in regard to assessment?
      ii. Are there any incentives for you or your department for conducting assessments?

9. To what extent, if any, does the Vice President for Student Life share assessment data with institutional constituents?
   a. How is the assessment data shared?
   b. Is institutional feedback relayed back to the staff in the Division of Student Life? If so, when and how?

10. Please share any additional comments you have about the Vice President for Student Life and her role in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life.
Interview Questions – Senior Student Affairs Officer (SSAO)

Section I – Participants Role within the Division of Student Life at Randal University

1. Please tell me about your role within the Division of Student Life at Randal University.
   a. What is your formal position within the Division of Student Life?
   b. What are the duties and responsibilities associated with this position?
   c. How long have you been an employee within the Division of Student Life?
   d. What is your educational background?
      i. Did you have any formal assessment training as part of your preparation?
   e. How would you define student affairs assessment?
      i. What specific experiences, development opportunities, education, and/or research have shaped your definition?

Section II – Assessment Practice within the Division of Student Life

2. Please tell me about the role and practice of assessment within the Division of Student Life.
   a. What is the purpose of practicing assessment within the Division of Student Life?
   b. What is required of you, given your position within the Division of Student Life, in regard to assessment?
   c. Have you practiced assessment within the Office of the Vice President for Student Life?
      i. Why or why not?
   d. How do you feel about conducting assessment(s)?
      i. Why do you feel this way?
   k. On average, how much of your time is devoted to assessment?
      i. Is this outlined in your position description?
      ii. To what extent does the practice of assessment influence your annual performance evaluation?
   l. What promotes and/or inhibits assessment practice within the Division of Student Life?

3. How do you think assessment is understood within the Division of Student Life?
   a. To what extent does the Division of Student Life reflect a culture of assessment? (i.e., A culture of assessment refers to a commitment among
student affairs professionals to utilize data to demonstrate how their programs and services are effective and contribute to the institution’s ability to fulfill its mission (Culp, 2012).)

b. To what extent is assessment practice valued within the Division of Student Life? Within the institution?
   i. How do you know?

4. To what extent is assessment data used to make decisions within the Division of Student Life?
   a. Who is a part of the decision-making process?
   b. Please provide an example of a time when assessment data was used to make a decision within the Division.

5. What role does accreditation play in the Division’s commitment to practice assessment?
   a. What is your involvement with accreditation in regard to assessment?

Section III – Role of the Vice President for Student Life

6. How would you describe your leadership of the Division for Student Life?
   a. How do you describe yourself as a supervisor?
   b. What are your strengths and weaknesses?

7. What role do you believe you play in creating and sustaining a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life?
   a. Why do you feel this way?

8. What is your philosophy regarding assessment practice in the Division of Student Life?
   a. What experiences have informed this belief?

9. To what extent, if any, do you promote the practice of assessment within your department? Throughout the Division of Student Life?
   a. What specific actions (if any) demonstrate your commitment to a divisional culture of assessment?
   b. To what extent, if any, did the practice of assessment change at Randal when you assumed the role of Vice President for Student Life?
      ii. How did you go about making this change?
      iii. What relationships were important to develop in this process?
      iv. How did you gage and respond to staff’s reactions to these changes?
   f. What organizational strategies have you put in place to promote assessment practice throughout the Division of Student Life?
i. Are there any professional development opportunities offered within the Division of Student Life in regard to assessment?

ii. Are there any incentives for you or your staff for conducting assessments?

10. To what extent, if any, do you share assessment data with institutional constituents?
   a. How is the assessment data shared?
   b. Is institutional feedback relayed back to the staff in the Division of Student Life?
      i. If so, how is this information shared with staff in the division?

11. Please share any additional comments you have about your role in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Life.
Appendix F

Informed Consent: Senior Student Affairs Officer

Description of the Study and Your Part in It

Tony Cawthon, Ph.D. and Lindsey Ridgeway are inviting you to take part in a research study to explore the Senior Student Affairs Officer's (SSAO) role in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Affairs at Randal University.

Tony Cawthon is a Professor of Student Affairs and Higher Education at Clemson University, and Lindsey Ridgeway is a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership, Counselor Education, Human and Organizational Development (more specifically Educational Leadership) at Clemson University.

Your part in the study will be to participate in an informational interview. The interview will be audio-recorded. You will be asked a series of questions about assessment practice within the Division of Student Life at Randal University and your perception of the role you play in creating a culture of assessment within the Division. Additionally, your part in the study provides the researchers permission to interview staff within the Division of Student Life about your leadership as it relates to the culture of assessment. Participation in this study is voluntary, and you do not have to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable answering.

It will take you approximately forty-five minutes to ninety-minutes to be in this study.

Risks and Discomforts

There are certain risks or discomforts that you might expect if you take part in this research. You may feel uncomfortable being interviewed about this particular topic and/or discussing the role in assessment and leadership strategies of the Vice President for Student Life. There is also a potential risk of breach of confidentiality. In order to minimize this risk, you will be given a pseudonym in order to protect your identity. Any identifiable places, activities, and events will also be given a pseudonym in order to protect any and all identifiable characteristics.

Lindsey Ridgeway will keep a research journal that will indicate the identity of each participant. This journal will be kept in a fireproof box at my home. Following the closing of the data through the IRB office at Clemson University, the identifying information in the researcher's journal will be destroyed.
Possible Benefits

We do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, participation in this study may provide the opportunity for you to learn about yourself and colleagues’ role in assessment at the institution and reflect critically on the assessment process within the Division of Student Life. There is also great benefit in contributing to the larger conversation surrounding assessment in Student Affairs.

Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality

Each participant and those described through their interview will be given a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. Any identifiable places, activities, and events will also be given a pseudonym in order to protect any and all identifiable characteristics of the participants. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Outside of the research team, no one will be aware that you participated in this study or what information we collected about you in particular. Once the interview has been transcribed, the audio-recording of the interview will be destroyed.

We might be required to share the information we collect from you with the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance and the federal Office for Human Research Protections. If this happens, the information would only be used to find out if we ran this study properly and protected your rights in the study.

Choosing to Be in the Study

You do not have to participate in this study, and you may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

If you choose to stop taking part in this study, the information you have already provided will be used in a confidential manner.

Participant Requirements

Participants in this study must meet the following criteria: (1) the individual is a full-time or part-time Randal University employee within the Division of Student Life, and (2) the individual has been a Randal University employee within the Division of Student Life for a minimum of six months.

Contact Information

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Tony Cawthon at Clemson University at (864) 656-5100.
If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071.
Appendix G

Informed Consent – Randal University Employee

Description of the Study and Your Part in It

Tony Cawthon, Ph.D. and Lindsey Ridgeway are inviting you to take part in a research study to explore the Senior Student Affairs Officer's (SSAO) role in promoting a culture of assessment within the Division of Student Affairs at Randal University.

Tony Cawthon is a Professor of Student Affairs and Higher Education at Clemson University and Lindsey Ridgeway is a doctoral student in the Department of Leadership, Counselor Education, Human and Organizational Development (more specifically Educational Leadership) at Clemson University.

Your part in the study will be to participate in an informational interview. The interview will be audio-recorded. You will be asked a series of questions about assessment practice within the Division of Student Life at Randal University and your perception of the extent to which the Vice President for Student Life has played a role in creating a culture of assessment within the Division. Participation in this study is voluntary and you do not have to answer any question that you do not feel comfortable answering.

It will take you approximately forty-five minutes to ninety-minutes to be in this study.

Risks and Discomforts

There are certain risks or discomforts that you might expect if you take part in this research. You may feel uncomfortable being interviewed about this particular topic and/or discussing the role in assessment and leadership strategies of the Vice President for Student Life. There is also a potential risk of breach of confidentiality. In order to minimize this risk, you will be given a pseudonym in order to protect your identity. Any identifiable places, activities, and events will also be given a pseudonym in order to protect any and all identifiable characteristics.

Lindsey Ridgeway will keep a research journal that will indicate the identity of each participant. This journal will be kept in a fireproof box at my home. Following the closing of the data through the IRB office at Clemson University, the identifying information in the researcher's journal will be destroyed.

Possible Benefits

We do not know of any way you would benefit directly from taking part in this study. However, participation in this study may provide the opportunity for you to learn about
yourself and colleagues’ role in assessment at the institution and reflect critically on the assessment process within the Division of Student Life. There is also great benefit in contributing to the larger conversation surrounding assessment in Student Affairs.

**Protection of Privacy and Confidentiality**

Each participant and those described through their interview will be given a pseudonym in order to protect their identity. Any identifiable places, activities, and events will also be given a pseudonym in order to protect any and all identifiable characteristics of the participants. We will do everything we can to protect your privacy and confidentiality. Outside of the research team, no one will be aware that you participated in this study or what information we collected about you in particular. Once the interview has been transcribed, the audio-recording will be destroyed.

We might be required to share the information we collect from you with the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance and the federal Office for Human Research Protections. If this happens, the information would only be used to find out if we ran this study properly and protected your rights in the study.

**Choosing to Be in the Study**

You do not have to participate in this study, and you may choose not to take part and you may choose to stop taking part at any time. You will not be punished in any way if you decide not to be in the study or to stop taking part in the study.

If you choose to stop taking part in this study, the information you have already provided will be used in a confidential manner.

**Participant Requirements**

Participants in this study must meet the following criteria: (1) the individual is a full-time or part-time Randal University employee within the Division of Student Life, and (2) the individual has been a Randal University employee within the Division of Student Life for a minimum of six months.

**Contact Information**

If you have any questions or concerns about this study or if any problems arise, please contact Tony Cawthon at Clemson University at (864) 656-5100.

If you have any questions or concerns about your rights in this research study, please contact the Clemson University Office of Research Compliance (ORC) at 864-656-6460 or irb@clemson.edu. If you are outside of the Upstate South Carolina area, please use the ORC’s toll-free number, 866-297-3071.
Appendix H

Documents Collected from Randal University

- PowerPoint from the TV in the Student Life Office waiting area (the presentation listed the mission of the Division, learning/developmental outcomes, etc.)
- Assessment Professional Development Course:
  - Syllabus
  - List of resources purchased for the program participants
  - Copy of completion certificate (blank)
  - Assessment data of learning outcomes from the course (2012 and 2013)
  - PowerPoint Presentations for each session
- Budgetary resources allocated to assessment practice in the Division
- Curriculum vitae for Madison and Michael
- Position descriptions for selection of staff in the
- Annual Performance Evaluation form
- Strategic plan for the Division of Student Life
- Assessment Philosophy Statement
- Pictures of Madison’s bookcases in office
Appendix I

Assessment Philosophy Statement

Introduction and Mission:

The mission of the Division of Student Life at Randal University states that we will provide a distinctive undergraduate experience for our students. We will ensure that we implement innovative activities and services which model “best practice” standards in student affairs administration and meets all the requirements outlined by our professional associations and accrediting bodies.

Assessment Philosophy Statement:

The Division of Student Life will develop a culture of assessment which assumes that the entire university is a learning community. As a result, all activities, programs and services of the Division should be implemented on the premise that they will be intertwined as a part of a comprehensive plan which integrates the student’s academic and personal development.

Departments within the Division will use assessment and benchmarking techniques to consistently evaluate the programs and services provided to Randal students on an annual basis.

Benchmarking research will include comparison studies with the ACS, comparable and aspirant institutional lists (attached).

The Departments within the Division will use the learning outcomes model of evaluation on all major programs on a three year rotation basis (i.e. every major program will be evaluated at least once every three years using this model) to ensure that our activities continue to meet the overall educational mission of the university.

As new staff members join the division, they will receive in-service training related to learning outcomes assessment. The Division will also continue to conduct regular assessment “refresher” in-service programs to help departments enhance their overall evaluation processes.

The eventual goal would be for all major Division activities and services to be based on the learning outcomes model.
REFERENCES


Busby, K., & Robinson, B. G. (2012). Developing the leadership team to establish and maintain a culture of evidence in student affairs. In M. M. Culp, & G. J. Dungy (Eds.), *Building a culture of evidence in student affairs: A guide for leaders and practitioners* (pp. 35-57). Washington, DC: NASPA.


