Exploration of How Assessment Professionals Describe Faculty Compliance with Academic Assessment in Higher Education

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ABSTRACT

Because higher education faculty directly impact student learning, it is important to understand how they perceive their roles in academic assessment and how they communicate their involvement in, and commitment to, academic assessment practices (Lee, Zhang, & Yin, 2011). Faculty may have different points of contact with academic assessment. Assessment professionals need to understand how faculty incorporate academic assessment practices into their professional routines and rituals, so that institutional leaders can provide better resources and smarter strategies to gain the compliance of faculty on academic assessment tasks (Daniels, 2011). To effectively measure student learning, assessment professionals need to understand how to provide resources for faculty that will ultimately lead to gains in student learning performance (Banta, 2007).

The purpose of this study was to explore how assessment professionals described their efforts to work collaboratively with faculty to gain their compliance on academic assessment tasks. Using the interpretive research paradigm, this study employed a qualitative methodology that utilized a collective case study research design. A collective case study research design was used to study collaborative behaviors within the context of assessment professionals' work. The collective case study design allowed the researcher to gather data from the perspective of multiple interrelated cases. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The processes of open coding, axial coding, subcoding, and NVivo coding were also used.

The findings of this study indicated that assessment professionals employ specific strategies to gain faculty compliance on academic assessment tasks. First, participants noted that communicating reciprocity was a helpful compliance strategy. In other words,

offering something in return to the faculty member seemed to help the faculty member complete the assessment task. Second, participants suggested that conveying flexibility and supportiveness, where appropriate, was also a useful compliance strategy. The participants described how they consciously made decisions about extending assessment deadlines based upon departmental or institutional circumstances. Third, the participants reiterated the importance of recognizing disciplinary-based connections to the assessment data. This intentional strategy helped the faculty members contextualize the data within their discipline. Finally, the participants offered six recommendations for working collaboratively with faculty on academic assessment tasks: 1) communicating reciprocity to faculty can be a helpful strategy for assessment professionals to gain compliance with assessment tasks; 2) assessment professionals should convey flexibility and supportiveness to their faculty colleagues in order to help build greater commitment to academic assessment; 3) faculty are engaged in assessment when a discipline-based connection is present; 4) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty emphasizes how the assessment data benefits faculty; 5) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty is dependent upon the extent to which the faculty member(s) and the assessment professional can propose a solution to the assessment problem, and 6) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty focuses on the creation of disciplinary connections to the assessment project.

The discussion of findings gives voice to the role of the assessment professional in higher education. Assessment professionals are an unstudied employee group within higher education, and this study aimed to contribute to the literature on this particular employee group.

The results of this study lead to several implications for higher education practice, including that the current accountability climate is not overwhelmingly empowering either to assessment professionals or faculty members; collaborative strategies used by assessment professionals need to be intentional in order to gain faculty compliance, assessment professionals must consciously work *together* with faculty to solve assessment problems, and assessment professionals may consider interprofessional collaboration as a legitimate compliance strategy. These four implications indicate that institutions will continue to be challenged to achieve greater faculty compliance with academic assessment within the current higher education environment.

The results of this study lead to several recommendations for higher education practice. The first recommendation is the need for assessment professionals to create meaningful professional development opportunities for faculty, so that faculty learn about assessment techniques and strategies at the course, program, and institutional levels. The second recommendation is that institutional leaders must explicitly state that academic assessment is a required part of the faculty contract. Clarifying these expectations for faculty is fair, especially because assessment practices generally require significant effort, especially when performed well. The third recommendation is that institutions must develop their own assessment policies that privilege continuous improvement of student learning. Institutions need to move *away* from using the term compliance, and instead develop and implement institutional policies that emphasize improvement. The fourth recommendation for higher education practice is to encourage assessment professionals to have more direct involvement with the academic decisions of their respective institutions. Direct involvement can take many forms, such as serving as a voting

member of an academic decision-making group, like a core curriculum committee, a general education committee, a state education board, or a departmental assessment subcommittee. The final recommendation for higher education practice is to create formal partnerships between assessment professionals and faculty. Examples of formal partnerships include the development of a faculty fellow program, the awarding of faculty assessment stipends, and the offering of workload credit or reassignment time to faculty who have significant responsibilities in assessment.

CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

The U.S. government has made a commitment to lead the world in postsecondary degree attainment and "the primary responsibility for assessing and improving student learning falls on colleges and universities" (New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability in Higher Education, 2012, p. 3). Institutions who grant educational credentials must ensure that students have developed the requisite knowledge, skills, values, and attitudes that prepare them for work, life, and responsible citizenship. This learning should be represented by the degree awarded (New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability in Higher Education, 2012).

While there is significant dialogue and data collection on student learning in American higher education at the national level, current scholarship has only focused on the role of an institution's academic support services and faculty instruction on successful student outcomes (Altbach, 2005). For example, researchers have documented multi-institutional studies that demonstrate the positive relationship between best practices among institutions and corresponding high student achievement within these institutions (e.g., Hanson & Mohn, 2011; Penn, 2011). Such best practices include significant student-faculty contact, availability of active-learning experiences, high expectations for academic performance, supportive and inclusive communities, and challenging students to analyze ideas and use multiple perspectives (Hanson & Mohn, 2011; Penn, 2011). Establishing best practices in assessing student learning is a task left generally to faculty. Faculty are responsible for finding ways to meaningfully measure the student learning

experiences that take place within their classrooms (Kuh, 2008). Beyond individual classroom or course-based assessment, institutions must continue to provide evidence that their faculty teach in an environment that is primarily focused on student learning (Webber, 2012).

Student learning in American higher education is an important component of President Barack Obama's 2010 launch of the American Graduation Initiative (AGI). The AGI formalized the President's goal of ensuring that the U.S. will lead the world in college graduates by 2020 (Schemo, 2011). Deemed the Completion Agenda, Ewell (2012) wrote that President Obama's goals are "laudable and, with significant effort, achievable" (p. 1). With American undergraduate graduation rates hovering at 40% (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, 2010), President Obama's 2020 graduation goals will require an aggressive overhaul of the current American higher education system. According to the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems ([NCHEMS], 2010), the nation will have to graduate an additional 8.2 million students to meet the Obama administration's goal. These additional graduates would produce a population in which 55% of adults would hold an associate or bachelor's degree (Lee et al., 2011a). To realize the President's goal, synergistic efforts among higher education assessment professionals, faculty, student affairs staff, and all academic leaders must prioritize student learning, student success, and student completion in order for baccalaureate graduation rates to grow from 40% to 60% by 2020 (Carnevale & Strohl, 2010).

Faculty carry the burden of academic assessment (Kuh, 2008). Academic assessment is broadly defined as the gathering and use of evidence of student learning in

decision making and in strengthening institutional performance and public accountability (Ikenberry & Kuh, 2015). Altbach (2005) identifies faculty as the *core* of an academic institution, and thereby all facets of student learning should be within their purview. In an analysis of undergraduate students' self-perceptions of their learning, Hoffman-Beyer and Gilmore (2007) found that "students feel that faculty are more important to their learning than any other factor" (p. 47). The onus of responsibility for ensuring student learning falls to faculty members, who must allocate time and resources to ensure that academic assessments are conducted accurately, wisely, and meaningfully (Kuh, 2008).

Background to the Problem

Methods of assessing student learning have shifted over the past two decades (Travers, 2012). Due to substantive changes in instruction and institutional pressures to show the value of college degrees, higher education assessment practices are increasingly focused on documenting student access, retention, completion, and satisfaction within college and university contexts (Eckel & King, 2004; Evans, 2013). These shifts in assessing learning also affect the ways in which faculty have traditionally taught in a collegiate classroom (Banta, 2011).

Assessment of student learning should be intentional and relevant to deliberately posed questions important to faculty, according to the guidelines for student learning evidence of the Western Association of Schools and Colleges ([WASC], 2014). Faculty concerns about student learning outcomes assessment are documented in the scholarly literature, especially in the ways that faculty resist assessment out of fear that the results would be used for evaluative purposes (e.g., Champagne, 2011; Linkon, 2005: Martinez-Aleman, 2012; Powell, 2011). In addition to these concerns over the misuse of

assessment for evaluation, there are many longstanding and historical challenges to describing the nature of faculty identity in the context of academic life (Alpert; 1985; Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Caughie, 2003; Engvall, 2003, Hutchings, 2010). First, complicated academic relationships between and among faculty colleagues present unique challenges to faculty life (Alpert, 1985; Hutchings, 2010). Second, conspicuous and inconspicuous hierarchies among faculty ranks presents a challenging aspect of academic culture (Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Hutchings, 2010). Third, uncertain expectations concerning teaching, research, and service obligations add complexity to the faculty role (Caughie, 2003; Hutchings, 2010). Finally, under-preparedness for the professoriate that likely excludes academic assessment from the formal preparation that new faculty receive is another challenge to academic life (Hutchings, 2010). These challenges, in and of themselves, may contribute to the manner in which faculty incorporate academic assessment into their professional obligations. Finkelstein, Seal, and Schuster (1998) posited that the assessment movement threatens to disrupt and even threaten academic life:

> The assessment movement, launched with vigor during the previous decade, continues to gain momentum and signals to the faculty that they are to be held more strictly accountable for what they do and for the results of their efforts. (p.1)

Because the assessment movement may disrupt traditional professorial tasks, four distinct challenges to academic life in the U.S. emerge to complicate faculty involvement in academic assessment (Alpert; 1985; Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Caughie, 2003; Engvall, 2003, Hutchings, 2010). These challenges include: 1) faculty roles are difficult

to define even in their simplest form; 2) faculty hierarchies are as complicated as the types of institutions that employ them; 3) institutional and disciplinary expectations for teaching, research, and service are usually not communicated explicitly, and 4) faculty members are generally given very little instruction on assessment practices in their own graduate training programs (Alpert; 1985; Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Caughie, 2003; Engvall, 2003, Hutchings, 2010). The four challenges listed above will be explored further below.

First, the American professoriate structure is both complicated and complex (Finkelstein et al., 1998). Faculty roles are typically organized into the specific genres of teaching, research, and service. For the purpose of this study, assessment of student learning is considered an additional task related to teaching (Campbell Wilkins, 2007; Finkelstein et al., 1998). Because the identity of a faculty member has traditionally been tied to teaching, research, and service, it is important to understand how faculty will manage assessment tasks as a distinct part of their professorial role (Finkelstein et al., 1998).

Second, faculty hierarchies are entangled because of the various roles and hierarchies within the professoriate itself. While many higher education researchers consider identity to one's discipline as important (e.g., Alpert, 1985; Campbell Wilkins, 2007; Caughie, 2003; Gioia & Thomas, 1996; Gouldner, 1957, 1958; Reybold, 2003; Tom, 2000), the concept of faculty identity has not been applied to the emergence of student learning outcomes assessment.

Third, uncertain expectations about how faculty manage teaching, research, and service loads, further complicates faculty identity. Tierney (1998) described how new

faculty are often at a loss for how to prioritize their professional obligations because there are numerous disparate tasks, all of which are important, but that sometimes do not connect to each other. Tierney (1998) described some of the challenges that faculty perceive to their work: pace of work, inefficiencies in completing teaching tasks such as grading papers or conducting labs, and uncertainty about tenure requirements. The extent to which faculty perceive student learning assessment as an important component of their professorial role is unstudied.

Fourth, a greater understanding of the gap between preparation for the professoriate and on-the-job expectations may offer helpful insights into how faculty describe their involvement with academic assessment. Reybold (2003) describes the development of initial faculty identities of doctoral students in education as they transition and adjust to the professoriate. Reybold (2003) maintains that "beyond the guided learning that sometimes occurs through assistantships and dissertation production, training for faculty roles all too frequently remains happenstance" (p. 235). Because many faculty enter into their professorial roles with very little, if any, training on academic assessment, it is important for higher education assessment professionals to understand how to educate and partner with faculty to ensure their institutions are meeting accreditation compliance, as well as measuring student learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how higher education assessment professionals described their efforts to work collaboratively with faculty in order to gain compliance on academic assessment tasks. A higher education assessment professional is a person who is employed in an institution of higher education and who has some level of

responsibility for conducting and/or reporting student learning outcomes at the institutional level. Of particular interest in the study were the experiences and perceptions of assessment professionals of working collaboratively with faculty, faculty commitment to academic assessment, faculty roles and contributions to assessment processes, and best practices for working successfully with faculty. It is important for higher education professionals and their institutions to understand how to partner with faculty on academic assessment in order to document institutional compliance for accreditation and external accountability. There is little research on this phenomenon. Downs (2014) has started to investigate some of the politics, psychology, and symbols surrounding how faculty members work with assessment professionals to complete assessment initiatives, yet his research does not specifically hone in on the strategies that assessment professionals use with faculty. Fuller and Beck's (2015) nation-wide report on the Faculty Survey of Assessment Culture found that faculty members have mixed feelings about the extent to which they value assessment, but this large-scale report did not investigate how assessment professionals work collaboratively with faculty.

Research Questions

The following four (4) research questions guided this study:

1) How do higher education assessment professionals describe their experiences collaborating with faculty on academic assessment?
2) How do assessment professionals describe faculty commitment to academic assessment in relationship to their other traditional professional obligations (teaching, research, and service)?

3) How do assessment professionals describe faculty roles and contributions to program, course, and institutional academic assessment processes?
4) What are best practices for effectively collaborating with faculty on academic assessment?

Significance of the Study

Faculty have a direct role in documenting student learning, so it is important for assessment professionals in higher education institutions to cultivate collaborative relationships with faculty (Diamond, 2011; Fink, 2003; Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). This study is significant because it explores faculty involvement in academic assessment from the perspectives and experiences of the assessment professional. There were no other studies found on this topic through the review of the literature conducted for the present study. Assessment professionals are responsible for ensuring that faculty are conducting student learning assessments in their classrooms, reporting these results, and using results for improvement purposes (Banta & Palomba, 2014; Kuh, Ikenberry, Jankowski, Cain, Ewell, Hutchings, & Kinzie, 2015)

Academic assessment is a task that is typically added to faculty responsibilities normally associated with teaching (Campbell Wilkins, 2007; Finkelstein et al., 1998). Because of the assessment burden on a faculty member's time and resources, it is not altogether surprising that faculty initially resist academic assessment (Palomba & Banta, 1999).

Faculty involvement with academic assessment can take many forms. This involvement is challenging because there is no one-size-fits-all approach to academic assessment (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Methods of assessing student learning are as

varied as the faculty who teach them (Kuh, 2008). For example, faculty responsibilities in assessment range from creating rubrics to designing quizzes or other course assessments that may be embedded in multi-section courses (Kuh, 2008). Huba and Freed (2000) documented many faculty tasks related to assessment including: designing rubrics intended to measure skill acquisition, creating graded or non-graded classroom activities to discern students' level of knowledge, and developing and scoring student portfolios to understand students' depth of knowledge. Not only do faculty conduct assessments, they generally also prepare documentation to submit to their department chair or institutional assessment office (DeNoriega, 2006).

Again, because student learning gains rest on the efforts of individual faculty members, it is important to explore how assessment professionals describe their efforts to work collaboratively with faculty in order to gain compliance on academic assessment tasks. Individual faculty efforts subsequently lead to institutional evidence of student achievement, which is a required component of institutional accreditation (Gaston, 2014; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Because many faculty enter into their professorial roles with very little, if any, training on academic assessment, it is important for higher education assessment professionals to understand how to educate and partner with faculty to ensure their institutions are meeting accreditation compliance, as well as measuring student learning.

Definition of Terms

The following operational definitions were used throughout this study:

Assessment professional. An assessment professional is a person who is employed in an institution of higher education and who has some level of responsibility

for conducting and/or reporting student learning outcomes at the institutional level (Banta & Palomba, 2014; Ewell, 2009; Suskie, 2009).

Academic assessment. Academic assessment is used as an umbrella term for student learning outcomes assessment and other types of assessment experiences. These include course, program, and university-level assessment (Banta & Blaich, 2011; Chafee, 2014; Ewell, 2014).

Faculty involvement with academic assessment. Faculty involvement with academic assessment is the way faculty communicate their specific roles as related to conducting academic assessment tasks (Beld, 2013; Blaich & Wise, 2011).

Assumptions of the Study

There are three assumptions that guided this research study. First, student learning outcomes and indirectly, general academic assessment practices, are increasingly under scrutiny by federal and state governments and regional and disciplinary-based accrediting bodies. Second, assessment professionals can gain greater compliance of faculty in assessment endeavors by better understanding how they value academic assessment. Third, assessment professionals are dependent upon faculty members to provide evidence of assessment activity.

Limitations to the Study

This study had the following limitations:

1. The research literature on higher education assessment professionals is limited.
2. The scope of this study examined only higher education professionals who were geographically located in West Texas and Eastern New Mexico.

3. Given the qualitative nature of this study, the transferability of the results of this study will be determined by the reader.

Conceptual Framework of the Study

The conceptual framework for this study was based on prior research that confirms that the role of faculty in higher education assessment is complicated by many factors, including resistance to assessment, uncertain role expectations (e.g., Campbell Wilkins, 2007; Finkelstein, Seal, & Schuster, 1998), and lack of training (e.g., Alpert; 1985; Blackburn & Lawrence, 1995; Caughie, 2003; Engvall, 2003, Hutchings, 2010). In addition, the framework is also based upon the research that documents how academic assessment has been established as a new practice within higher education institutions (e.g., Eraut, 2006; Ewell, 1994; Ferguson, 2011; Hunt & Tierney, 2006; Lew, Alwis & Schmidt, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1997), and that assessment practices within higher education institutions are highly idiosyncratic (Hutchings, 2010).

Faculty resistance to academic assessment has been well documented in the literature (e.g., Hutchings, 2010, Kuh, 2008). To counter faculty resistance, Pike (2011) argues that college and university administrators, as well as faculty members, are more likely "to take responsibility for student learning if they believe that the assessment data represent their students and suggest specific actions for improvement" (p. 177). Within the past several decades, one strategy to strengthen faculty engagement in academic assessment is to anchor assessment more firmly in the disciplines rather than more broad-based assessment of student learning (Palomba & Banta, 2011). Hutchings (2011) perceives that disciplinary-based assessment strategies may lead to "real improvement in teaching and learning" (p. 37). Another strategy to encourage faculty compliance in

academic assessment may be to explicitly anchor and/or embed assessment within the academic culture of an institution (Paulson, 2012). While faculty may or may not embrace assessment practices as part of their academic identities, it is important due to accountability and accreditation standards, to understand and establish academic assessment as a formalized faculty performance expectation (Blaaka & Cathrine, 2005, 2006).

Faculty roles and expectations in higher education assessment are not particularly well-defined or formalized (Trullen & Rodriguez, 2013). Trullen and Rodriguez found that faculty who perceive assessments are carried out for quality improvement reasons are more likely to rate academic assessment as legitimate and were more likely to be more identified and/or aligned with the academic program that was being assessed. There are some faculty, though, that view academic assessment as too instrumental or even too powerful when determining the future of an academic program (Trullen & Rodriguez). Faculty are generally not trained on types of assessment or assessment methodologies in their graduate programs, so it is not surprising that this lack of assessment training affects faculty perceptions of assessment (Banta, 2011; Maki, 2010, Reybold, 2003). Reybold (2003) maintains that "beyond the guided learning that sometimes occurs through assistantships and dissertation production, training for faculty roles all too frequently remains happenstance" (p. 235).

Academic assessment has been established as a new practice in institutions of higher education. Green (2011) notes that American higher education assessment is in the midst of a significant transformation, as institutions move to provide deep evidence of student learning gains. Green wrote that "over time, the assessment of learning outcomes

will gain traction and sophistication and become more fully integrated into the overall methodology of quality assurance" (p. 20).

As identified by Hutchings (2010), institutional assessment strategies are highly idiosyncratic based upon institutional type and institutional mission, and these strategies should ideally reflect the curricular and non-curricular goals of an institution. Institutional assessment strategies are typically organized around actuarial data, accreditation reviews, institutional quality ratings, student surveys, and testing students' general education skills (Jankowski, 2012).

Summary of Methodology

This qualitative collective case study was conducted through the lens of the interpretivist paradigm. The collective case study design allowed the researcher to gather data from the perspective of multiple interrelated cases and it allowed the researcher to study complex phenomena within their contexts (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003), and to analyze and compare the assessment professionals' experiences of collaborating with faculty.

Data for the study was collected through the researcher's lens, semi-structured interviews, and researcher notes. Data analysis for this study used interpretive inquiry, which allowed the researcher to make interpretations of what she saw, heard and understood (Creswell, 2014, Ponterotto, 2005). The constant comparative method of data analysis along with open coding were used. After the initial open coding process was complete, axial coding, subcoding, and NVivo coding were used. Trustworthiness of the study was ensured through appropriate qualitative strategies to address the study's credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.

Summary

Chapter I discussed how assessment professionals are dependent upon faculty to provide evidence of student learning assessment. This chapter also discussed the growing accountability movement, which has created an environment for faculty which demands they assess student learning. Assessment professionals, then, are tasked with working alongside faculty to ensure that they are compliant with academic assessment directives assigned by a department, college, or institutional leader. This chapter also presented four challenges to describing faculty identity, and how academic assessment in particular is a unique task that is typically excluded from the traditional definitions of academic life. Because institutions are dependent upon the work of individual faculty members to measure student learning, it is important to study the ways in which assessment professionals work collaboratively with faculty members to gain their compliance on academic assessment tasks.

Organization of the Remainder of the Study

Chapter II provides a review of the literature on assessment in higher education. Chapter III will discuss the methodology and research design for the study. Chapter IV will discuss the findings of the study and Chapter V will conclude a discussion of the study’s findings, implications and recommendations for higher education, and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Chapter II presents a review of the salient literature related to academic assessment in higher education. The following topics will be discussed: 1) a history of institutional approaches to assessment in higher education, 2) the impact of accountability on assessment and instruction, 3) faculty roles in assessment, 4) institutional approaches to assessment, and 5) an overview of assessment professionals in higher education that was used as the foundation for this study. The purpose of this study was to explore how assessment professionals described their efforts to work collaboratively with faculty to gain their compliance on academic assessment tasks.

History of Institutional Approaches to Assessment in Higher Education

Ewell and Jones (2006) traced the history of the assessment movement in higher education. From the 1960's to the 1970's, higher education institutions began to examine themselves as stewards of financial responsibility and compliance. During this time, institutions began to see themselves as accountable not only to their local boards and communities, but also to their state governments (Ewell, 1997).

In the mid 1980's, assessment briefly emerged as a tool to measure student learning outcomes (Ewell, 1997). These initiatives were short-lived and were primarily introduced at the state level. Alexander Astin's (1983) early work in academic assessment in the 1980's was based on the I-E-O model, which was a conceptual framework that is still widely regarded as one of the foundational principles of academic assessment practices. Astin's (1983) I-E-O model incorporates inputs, environments, and outcomes as the basis for collegiate success. Inputs include the personal skills and/or

aptitude that a student brings to the classroom (Astin, 1983). Environments are the settings where student learning occurs, and outputs refer to the desired skill and/or knowledge acquisition resulting from the environment (Astin, 1983). Astin (2012) identifies that "inputs and outcomes simply refer to the same person at two different time points, and environment refers to the intervening experiences" (p. 23). However, as Ewell (2005) pointed out, those initiatives that began in the 1980's were too difficult to enforce due to the political pressures of the recessionary economy of the early 1990's. From 1990 to the present, assessment has been focused on regional accreditation compliance and meeting compliance with ever-changing accreditation standards (Paulson, 2012).

Formal attention to academic assessment developed in the early 1990's, as higher education was primarily focused on information acquisition and synthesis (Travers, 2011). In the mid-1990's, the purpose of assessment was debated, and had not yet been fully embraced as a legitimate practice (Kinzie, Hutchings, & Jankowski, 2015). Wright (1997) asserted that higher education assessment could solve both accountability requests and data that could be used to improve student learning. Further, higher education was being transformed as more people took advantage of online higher education options that were available in the mid-to-late 1990's. (Kamenetz, 2010). As students began to accept online course instruction as a viable method of acquiring degrees and certificates, Kamenetz (2010) suggested that a self-regulated learner in a do it yourself (DIY) society would seek to develop his or her own education, regardless of existing structures and institutions. Therefore, because students have many academic choices beyond the traditional brick-and-mortar approach to degree completion, some scholars argue that

assessment practices in higher education are in a state of natural evolution that is concerned with assessing higher order critical thinking (Archer, 2010; Cramp, 2011). Others argue that higher education assessment should focus on discrete learning gains related to career and employment-readiness (e.g., Hounsell, McCune, Hounsell, & Litjens, 2008).

In the early 2000's, using assessment data to benefit students' learning experiences has been documented in the scholarly literature (e.g., Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Ikenberry and Kuh (2015) discussed that current higher education assessment efforts must shift away from a focus on compliance and move towards a focus on improvement. MacMahon (2009) documented that institutions must use their assessment data for more than compliance purposes; instead of using assessment data to include in accreditation reports, institutions should collect and use assessment data to help students acquire high-demand jobs within the American economy. Braskamp and Engberg (2014) asserted that assessment data should be used as tools for action to help institutions strengthen their degree programs and their curricular offerings.

Kuh et al. (2015) stated that "if campus leaders, faculty and staff, and assessment professionals change the way they think about and undertake their work, they can multiply the contributions of learning outcomes assessment to American higher education," (p. 3). This team-based approach to student learning outcomes assessment is endorsed by other authors who have recently developed tools to guide assessment practice (Banta & Palomba, 2014; Ewell, 2009; Suskie, 2009). Taking a team-based or

partnership approach to assessment may also raise the public's confidence in its academic institutions (Kuh et al., 2015).

Definition of Higher Education Assessment

Academic assessment is broadly defined as the gathering and use of evidence of student learning in decision making and in strengthening institutional performance and public accountability (Ikenberry and Kuh, 2015). There is no generally agreed upon definition of higher education assessment, and according to Evans (2013), few studies have systematically investigated the meaning of assessment. For some, assessment is a kind of measurement instrument (e.g., Clark, 2011; Quality Assurance Agency, 2011), whereas for others, assessment feedback is an integral part of assessment (e.g., Angelo, 1995). Evans (2013) uses the term *assessment feedback* as an umbrella concept that includes all feedback exchanges generated within assessment design, occurring within and beyond the immediate learning context.

Kuh et al. (2015) discussed many relevant issues to the definition and application of assessment practice: changing student characteristics and needs, technological advances, intensified competition for students, economic and competitive forces, and skepticism about educational quality. These challenges can be confronted by cultivating institutional ownership of student learning outcomes, deploying assessment practices in ways that inform campus needs and priorities, and using the resulting information in consequential ways (Kuh et al., 2015).

Types of Academic Assessment

There are two types of assessment methods that are important to describe for this study: 1) formative assessment, and 2) summative assessment. Formative and summative

assessment strategies are often used by faculty in a classroom setting to capture the learning that occurs from the beginning of the course to the end of the course (Banta, 2011; Palomba & Banta, 1999). Formative assessment is conducted at the beginning of a course, and is usually conducted to determine what type of action should be taken by the faculty member to strengthen the student's understanding of course material (William & Black, 1996). Summative assessment provides a judgment of the level of students' skills, knowledge, and behaviors near the conclusion of their classroom experience (Taras, 2005). Harlen and James (1997) argue that formative and summative assessment strategies are linked to instructional best-practices strategies, because they provide the student with meaningful feedback at the start and end of a course.

Classroom Assessment

Classroom assessment specifically refers to formative learning activities within an undergraduate or graduate course. Angelo and Cross (1993) described nearly 50 classroom assessment techniques (CAT) that can occur within a higher education setting. Some of the assessment activities they describe include: one-minute paper, the muddiest point paper, chain notes, application article, student-generated test questions, suggestion box, peer review, journaling, exam evaluations, and student rep group. Many authors have used and published assessment studies utilizing Angelo and Cross' specific CAT methods (e.g., Callan & Finney, 2002; Flint, 1993; Williams & Scott, 2013).

In addition to classroom assessment techniques, Lauer (2012) specified a best-practices approach for continuously assessing student learning throughout a course. Lauer (2012) recommended that course assessments are aimed at both the improvement

of the student's learning and the faculty's teaching, and that course assessments should not always be used to assign grades.

Closing the loop is commonly referred to as studying assessment findings to see what improvements might be suggested and taking the appropriate steps to make them (Banta & Blaich, 2011). Assessment of student learning in higher education is often embedded in discussions about closing the loop in order to produce positive learning effects for students and for the institutions within which these students are enrolled (Black & Wiliam, 1998; Hattie & Timperley, 2007). Shute (2008) suggested that closing the loop occurs very rarely, both at the student and institution levels. Other researchers have questioned whether closing the loop even minimally occurs. For example, Perera, Lee, Win, Perera, and Wijesuriya (2008) debated whether assessment even minimally affects teaching practices. Orrell (2006) argued that assessment feedback practices seem to be lacking, conflicting, and inconsistent among different types of institutions, including community colleges and baccalaureate-granting institutions. However, others note that there is significant progress in the field of higher education assessment, with peer feedback becoming an increasingly central aspect of higher education's learning and teaching strategies (e.g., Brown, 2010; Maringe, 2010). Due to the proliferation of online education, some researchers are suggesting that a new culture of assessment within higher education has been identified, suggesting that peer assessment is being used to promote student self-regulatory practice (e.g., Cartney, 2010; Evans, 2013; Nicol, 2010; Rust, 2007).

Institutional Best Practices for Measuring Student Learning

From an institutional perspective, assessment of student learning is multi-faceted and unique to the institution's mission, resources, and methods (Cross, 2008). A best practices perspective suggests that direct, observable student behavior and performance on classroom-based assessment, coupled with indirect assessment techniques related to student self-perception, provide evidence of student learning (Cross & Steadman, 1996). Much research has focused on this symbiotic relationship between direct and indirect measures of student learning (e.g., Eraut, 2006; Ewell, 1994; Ferguson, 2011; Hunt & Tierney, 2006; Lew, Alwis & Schmidt, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1997).

The foremost longitudinal study of institutional assessment practices is the Wabash National Study of Liberal Education, a multiyear effort from 2006 – 2012, to determine how much students change during their time in college (Cain & Hutchings, 2015). Participating campuses in the Wabash study were asked to identify a "specific point of assessment data that would be more fully understood and actionable with student input" (Blaich & Wise, 2011, p. 1). One of the most lauded findings from the Wabash study was to include students within institutions' assessment initiatives (Baker, 2012). The Wabash approach included students within institutions' assessment processes, and participating institutions then developed student-faculty teams and student-staff teams to interpret assessment data (Baker, 2012).

Beld (2013) and Blaich and Wise (2011) recommended that institutions should consider the *anticipated use* of their assessment activities. This backward design has been implemented at St. Olaf College, and has resulted in assessment data that was used for purposes such as advising, curriculum revision, pedagogical changes, resource

allocation, faculty development, and program review (American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum, 1992; Beld, 2013; Blaich & Wise, 2011).

Little empirical evidence exists regarding the best type of assessments for all classroom situations (Mutch, 2003). Researchers have raised questions about the quality of assessments (e.g., Case, 2007; Walker, 2009), and the lack of consistency in patterns of assessment results (e.g., Carillo-de-la-Pena, Casereas, Martinez, Ortet, & Perez, 2009; Shute, 2008). Too little is known about the efficacy of academic assessments at the course and program level. Sadler (2010) suggested that “There remain many things that are not known about how best to design assessment events that lead to improved learning for students in higher education” (p. 547). Richman and Ariovich (2013) discussed how classroom assessment work has had a difficult time establishing itself as a recognized source of evidence.

However, an emerging movement for conducting authentic assessment – performances on complex, real-world tasks – has fueled an interest in assessment evidence that comes from the classroom (Kuh et al., 2015). This authentic approach to assessing student learning is documented in the Degree Qualifications Profile (DQP), introduced by the Lumina Foundation in 2011 (Ewell, 2013). The DQP is a national effort to measure authentic student learning skills at the degree program level (Ewell, 2013). The DQP is a learner-centered framework for what college graduates should know and be able to do to earn the associate, bachelor’s, or master’s degree (Adelman, Ewell, Gaston, & Geary Schneider, 2014).

Alverno College, a small, Midwestern, private Roman Catholic liberal arts college, is often lauded as a best-practices institution for both its commitment to student

learning assessment and its unique approach to measuring student development (Banta, 2010; Kuh, 2008). Alverno College does not assign student grades, but instead evaluates student learning through a Digital Diagnostic Portfolio (DDP), which is a web-based portfolio system that tracks student learning progress throughout the duration of a student's degree program (Anderson & Staub, 2015).

While the Alverno College approach to institutional assessment is unique to the institution's mission, it is not a representative institutional approach. Yorke (2003) stated that institutional approaches to assessment are highly idiosyncratic. He argues that getting institutional assessment right should be focused on learning gains unique to the institution's purpose and mission. Institutional approaches to assessment are described as frenzied (Shavelson & Huang, 2003). Shavelson and Huang (2003) further noted that the "current frenzy for assessing learning is well-intentioned, but needs a coherent sense of direction" (p. 18). Research literature documents the frenetic nature of institutional assessment and the myriad ways that institutions approach academic assessment (e.g., Shavelson & Huang, 2003; York, 2003).

Because institutions have idiosyncratic ways of measuring student learning, this current study supports the need to describe how assessment professionals successfully partner with faculty on academic assessment tasks. Downs (2014) has started to investigate some of the politics, psychology, and symbols surrounding how faculty members work with assessment professionals to complete assessment initiatives, yet his research does not specifically hone in on the collaborative strategies that assessment professionals use with faculty. Fuller and Beck's (2015) nation-wide report on the Faculty Survey of Assessment Culture found that faculty members have mixed feelings

about the extent to which they value assessment, but this large-scale report did not investigate how assessment professionals worked collaboratively with faculty.

Institutional Assessment Strategies

Institutional assessment strategies are highly idiosyncratic, and these strategies should ideally reflect the curricular and non-curricular goals of the institution (Hutchings, 2010). Historically, the quality of higher education programs has been assessed through multiple measures and indicators to achieve triangulation; the process of triangulation is often described as using multiple pieces of information to gain a better understanding of an unknown or partially unknown phenomenon (Astin, 1993; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Terenzini, 1997). To measure student learning, many institutions use a combined approach of nationally normed assessments like the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Performance (CAAP), Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA), and/or the Education Testing Services (ETS) Proficiency Profile. Additionally, institutions often develop their own assessment instruments (Banta, 2011). The complexity and uniqueness of these assessment measures are difficult to measure, yet institutions still continue to use multiple methodologies to attempt to demonstrate student learning gains. For the most part, institutional assessment strategies fall into five categories: 1) actuarial data, 2) accreditation reviews, 3) institutional quality ratings, 4) student surveys, and 5) testing students' general education skills (Jankowski, 2012).

Institutional assessment strategies are also influenced by the Voluntary System of Accountability (VSA), which was created in 2007 after reauthorization of the Higher Education Act (Voluntary System of Accountability, 2015). The VSA emerged out of the national conversation on higher education accountability that was started by the

Spellings Commission (Commission on the Future of Higher Education, Secretary of Education, U.S. Department of Education, 2006). The VSA created a standardized method for participating institutions to provide public information about student performance at their institutions. Kuh et al. (2015) discussed that "demands for institutional accountability and compliance with the dictates of external forces are unlikely to diminish," (p. 19).

Institutions struggle with designing, developing and implementing a sustainable comprehensive approach to assessing student learning that leads to meaningful use of results (Friedlander & Serban, 2004). Friedlander and Serban (2004) said that the principal institutional challenges lies in making assessment comprehensive enough to encompass various types of programs, staffing situations, course delivery modes, and student mobility so as to provide useful information for improving student learning. Periodic program review of undergraduate and graduate degree programs is a common institutional assessment strategy that shows the impact on student learning and success (Cooper & Terrell, 2013; Maki, 2004; Provesis, 2012). Walvoord (2004) further emphasized the need to embed responsibility for assessment into existing institutional processes, such as cyclical reviews of departments and programs, strategic planning, general education curriculum reform, budget requests, instructional evaluation, and other student learning initiatives.

Pike (2011) argues that college and university administrators, as well as faculty members, are more likely "to take responsibility for student learning if they believe that the assessment data represent their students and suggest specific actions for improvement" (p. 177). To this end, institutions must be equipped with current data that

they feel are accurate and representative of current student performance, both inside and outside the curriculum.

Within the past several decades, there has been an influx of literature related to anchoring assessment more firmly in the disciplines rather than more broad-based assessment of student learning. These types of broad assessments are typical of national achievement tests (Banta, 1993; Heiland & Rosenthal, 2011; Hutchings, 2011). Hutchings (2011) argued that disciplinary-based assessment strategies may lead to “real improvement in teaching and learning” (p. 37). Therefore, one strategy to encourage faculty compliance in academic assessment may be to explicitly anchor and/or embed assessment within the academic culture of the institution (Paulson, 2012).

Greater Calls for Accountability and Assessment

Accountability is a term used often in higher education, and it often implies that higher education is under scrutiny on many levels; including local, state, regional, and federal levels (Burke, 2005). Accountability in higher education goes to the core of what is essentially a quintessential American ideal – that higher education is a public good that should be attainable for all Americans (Burke, 2005). Hall (2012) states that the accountability movement has created an environment of market self-regulation within higher education that ultimately benefits students. The New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability in Higher Education (2012) has defined a national series of guidelines for assessment and accountability in higher education which includes: 1) setting ambitious goals for the desired outcomes of undergraduate education; 2) gathering systematic processes for gathering evidence of student learning; 3) using evidence to improve student learning; and 4) reporting evidence and results to both

internal and external constituents (New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability in Higher Education, 2012). Carnevale and Strohl (2010) suggests that higher education is an important social responsibility and that this responsibility calls for a commitment to evidence-based improvement of student learning gains.

Several authors describe accountability in higher education at various levels or directions, including upward, downward, inward, and outward (e.g., Corbett, 1996; Vidovich & Slee, 2000). Upward accountability usually derives from a legal or bureaucratic entity that governs an institution of higher education (Vidovich & Slee, 2000). Downward accountability originates from a manager who is responsible for ensuring that workplace tasks are completed, whereas inward accountability derives from an intrinsic desire to perform well (Corbett, 1996). Outward accountability is attributed to external stakeholders who have a stake in the institution's performance (Vidovich & Slee, 2000).

The accountability movement has transformed not only academic assessment practices, but other significant areas of higher education (Eaton, 2009). For example, Eaton (2009) found that the U.S. Department of Education's recognition standards require accreditors to maintain performance measures on a host of criteria, including student achievement, curriculum standards, facilities maintenance, fiscal health, student affairs practices, admissions, and financial aid.

Huisman and Curie (2004) discussed the implications of the accountability movement both in Europe and the U.S. as a "bridge over troubled water" (p. 529). Alexander (2000) discussed how state economic policy has pressured states to become more efficient and more accountable in all facets of higher education institutions,

including learning outcomes and fiscal responsibility. With greater expectations being placed on higher education to meet national and state workforce demands, higher education is continually in a state of looking inward and constant self-examination (King, 2000).

Faculty Roles in Student Learning and Assessment

Graff (2010) wrote that "outcomes assessment makes us seriously ask whether our undergraduates are actually learning what we are teaching (p. 160). Faculty roles are essential for academic assessment to take place, and the scholarly literature has documented the faculty's central role in ensuring the quality of higher education experiences (Cain & Hutchings, 2015; Diamond, 2011; Fink, 2003; Huber & Hutchings, 2005). Diamond (2011) and Fink (2003) drew a direct connection between the important role that faculty play in influencing and improving student learning. Diamond's (2011) research specifically linked faculty instructional techniques to improved student learning gains, especially when faculty link classroom concepts to applied real-life problems. Bresciani's (2006) research emphasized that faculty instructional techniques are mostly responsible for improved assessment results, and that faculty must be engaged in assessment endeavors in order to modify their instructional methods. Banta and Blaich (2010) discussed the critical importance of faculty participation in assessment, so that faculty are committed to improving student learning by taking action against the findings of assessment results. Their grassroots approach suggests that assessment is successful when institutions engage in the following four phases: 1) planning institutional assessments, 2) implementing assessments, 3) sustaining a routine administration of assessments, and 4) improving results based upon assessment findings (Banta & Blaich,

2010). Banta and Blaich (2010) argued that effective assessment must put student learning first, and that instructional strategies must reflect this ethos. Moreover, when assessment discussions about closing the loop emerge on college campuses, student learning should be the dominant theme, rather than accreditation standards or student performance on nationally standardized tests (Banta, 2011).

Faculty roles in higher education assessment are not particularly well-defined (Trullen & Rodriguez, 2013). However, despite a lack of existing literature, a few studies have illustrated their importance in assessment of student learning. For example, Trullen and Rodriguez (2013) conducted their own institutional survey of 300 faculty across 20 academic programs, and they found that faculty perceived their individual participation in the assessment process as important to the institution's overall assessment initiatives. Moreover, Trullen and Rodriguez (2013) found that faculty who perceived assessments were carried out for quality improvement reasons were more likely to rate academic assessment as legitimate and were more likely to be more identified and/or aligned with the academic program that was being assessed. Despite these findings, some faculty viewed academic assessments as too instrumental or even too powerful when determining the future of an academic program (Trullen & Rodriguez, 2013).

Faculty Participation in Academic Assessment

Faculty participation in academic assessment can take many forms, and is complicated by the notion that there is not a one-size-fits-all approach to academic assessment (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Methods of assessing student learning are as varied as the faculty who teach them (Kuh, 2008). As discussed previously, Angelo and Cross (1993) describe nearly 50 classroom assessment techniques (CAT) that can occur

within a higher education setting. Not only must faculty conduct these types of assessments, but they generally must also prepare documentation to submit to their department chair and/or institutional assessment office (DeNoriega, 2006). Academic assessment, it could reasonably be argued, is an additional task added to typical faculty responsibilities that are normally associated with teaching (Campbell Wilkins, 2007; Finkelstein, Seal, & Schuster, 1998). Because of this additional burden on a faculty member's time and resources, it is not altogether surprising that faculty initially resist academic assessment (Palomba & Banta, 1998). In short, a faculty member's role in academic assessment can best be described as a series of tasks related to the administration, collection, and documentation of student learning outcomes.

Overview of Assessment Professionals in Higher Education

Assessment professionals are an unstudied employee group within higher education. An assessment professional is defined as a person who is employed in an institution of higher education, and who has some level of responsibility for conducting and/or reporting student learning outcomes at the institutional level (Banta & Palomba, 2014; Ewell, 2009; Suskie, 2009). Assessment professionals are described as agents of change, who along with campus leaders, faculty and staff, can "multiply the contributions of learning outcomes assessment to American higher education" (Kuh et al., 2015, p. 3).

Summary

Chapter II presented the foundational literature relevant to assessment history and assessment practice (Burke, 2005; Carnevale & Strohl, 2010; Eaton, 2009; Ewell, 2012; Schemo, 2011). The researcher discussed how assessment has evolved from a focus on financial responsibility and compliance to an emphasis on using assessment results as a

method to improve both student learning and institutional performance (Ewell, 1997; Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Kuh, Jankowski, Ikenberry, & Kinzie, 2014). Institutional best practices were contextualized as multi-faceted and unique to the institution's mission, resources, and methods (Cross, 2008). The researcher presented recommendations by Kuh et al. (2015) and Ewell (2013) for institutions to engage in authentic assessment methods that demonstrate student learning gains in applied settings. Institutional assessment strategies were described as highly idiosyncratic, and are typically organized around actuarial data, accreditation reviews, institutional quality ratings, student surveys, and testing students' general education skills (Jankowski, 2012).

The researcher discussed the literature on the accountability movement within the U.S., and how this has caused higher education to be in a continuous state of looking inward and constant self-examination (King, 2000). Literature was presented on the critical role that faculty play in classroom-based assessment and institutional assessment (Cain & Hutchings, 2015; Diamond, 2011; Fink, 2003; Huber & Hutchings, 2005). Chapter II confirmed that there is little scholarly work that describes assessment professionals and their work with faculty (Banta & Palomba, 2014; Ewell, 2009; Suskie, 2009). The researcher will present the methodology and research design for this study in Chapter III.

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Chapter III will describe the methodology and research design for this study. The sections presented include: 1) research questions; 2) research design; 3) data collection; 4) data analysis; 5) trustworthiness of the study; and 6) the context of the study and the researcher. The purpose of this study was to explore how assessment professionals described their efforts to work collaboratively with faculty members in order to gain compliance on academic assessment tasks. Assessment professionals' experiences working with faculty are important to understand, especially because they need to provide faculty with resources, strategies, and methods to measure student learning at the course, program, and institutional level (Ehrmann, 1998).

Research Questions

The following four (4) research questions guided this study:

1) How do higher education assessment professionals describe their experiences collaborating with faculty on academic assessment?
2) How do assessment professionals describe faculty commitment to academic assessment in relationship to their other traditional professional obligations (teaching, research, and service)?
3) How do assessment professionals describe faculty roles and contributions to program, course, and institutional academic assessment processes?
4) What are best practices for effectively collaborating with faculty on academic assessment?

Research Design

Establishing the Paradigm

A research paradigm is closely linked to the researcher's ways of perceiving reality, subjectivity, and objectivity (Ponterotto, 2005). This study was situated within the interpretivist paradigm, which holds that reality is subject, multiple, and socially constructed by its participants (Amare, 2005; Bryman, 1984; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Krauss, 2005). Research paradigms are viewed on a continuum, beginning with post-positivism and then moving on through postmodernism (Nutt Williams & Morrow, 2009). This research spectrum is important, because it represents movement where reality is assumed to be predictable and human behavior is assumed to be determined, to a point where reality is assumed to be socially constructed through human behavior.

The research paradigm influences the selection of the problem or phenomenon under investigation, the research questions asked, the theoretical positions taken, the method chosen, the analysis of data, and the decisions about what the findings suggest about the phenomenon studied (Ponterotto, 2005). For example, while a scholar writing from the positivism location on the continuum tends to maintain a certain distance from the phenomenon being observed, interpretivists tend to immerse themselves more completely in the research participants' experiences (Ponterotto, 2005). In this case, the phenomenon under exploration is the perceptions and experiences of higher education assessment professionals of working with faculty to gain compliance on academic assessment tasks. Because the study sought to describe the experiences of people working in multiple higher education assessment contexts and because the researcher herself is an assessment professional, the interpretivist paradigm was appropriate

because the researcher's values were inherent and present throughout the entire research project (Amare, 2005; Bryman, 1984; Guba & Lincoln, 1994; Krauss, 2005).

Type of Study

Qualitative research is a field of inquiry that crosscuts disciplines and it is an interconnected research approach that can link theory to application (Denzin & Lincoln 2005). Moreover, qualitative approaches can be especially beneficial to a field of study when the phenomena under investigation is relatively new and understudied, and about which there are no available theoretical explanations (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Strauss and Corbin, 1997).

Qualitative research is fundamentally interpretive and typically draws on multiple methods that respect the humanity of the participants and reveal their understandings within specific domains of experiences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). A qualitative research methodology is an appropriate method for this study because of its interpretive approach to studying assessment professionals (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This study is consistent with the spirit of qualitative research in four ways: 1) it satisfies the epistemological and ontological assumptions of the interpretivist paradigm; 2) the study meets the technical methodological standards of qualitative methods; 3) the research is context-driven and timely; and 4) this research respects the unique perspectives of the participants (Kvale & Brinkmann, 2009). The combination of methodological and theoretical goodness-of-fit, respect for the situated experiences of academic professionals, and the contemporary context of student learning in American higher education, necessitates an interpretive approach to the problem.

This interpretive approach to the problem led the researcher to conclude that a collective case study research design would produce an in-depth description of the participants' experiences (Merriam, 2014). A qualitative collective case study is an intensive, holistic description and analysis of a bounded phenomenon (Merriam, 2014). The collective case study research design allows researchers to study complex phenomena (Baxter & Jack, 2008; Yin, 2003). In this study, a collective case study research design was used to understand individuals or small numbers of cases to generate new accounts or explanations out of data, rather than test existing theories (Richards, 2014). A collective case study research design "is needed for researchers who are trying to learn something new, rather than test something that is known" (Richards & Morse, 2014, p. 21).

For a collective case study, the study usually begins with the selection of a few cases (Stake, 2006). Because one of the goals of a collective case study is to understand how the phenomenon being studied exists in different environments, the selection of cases may include typical and atypical cases to best understand the phenomenon (Stake, 2006). Because assessment of student learning in higher education is both idiosyncratic on the institutional level and highly individualized based upon a faculty member's pedagogical assumptions and preferences, it was appropriate to utilize a collective case study design (Merriam, 2014; Kuh, 2008).

Participants and Sampling

Participants for this study were assessment professionals at both two- and four-year colleges and universities geographically located in West Texas and Eastern New Mexico. These individuals had some level of responsibility for academic assessment

projects or initiatives at their institution. The researcher developed a list of potential participants for this study by identifying them through their institution's public website. The institutions from which the participants were recruited included: New Mexico Junior College, Eastern New Mexico University, West Texas A&M University, Amarillo College, Angelo State University, Lubbock Christian University, Abilene Christian University, University of the Southwest, South Plains College, Midland College, Odessa College, and University of Texas – Permian Basin.

Inclusion criteria for participants in this study were that they were higher education assessment professionals who had some level of responsibility for academic assessment projects or initiatives at their college or university. In addition, because assessment professionals collaborate with all types of faculty, including part-time faculty, research faculty, practice-oriented faculty, tenure-track faculty, and non-tenure track faculty, the researcher did not intentionally exclude research participants based upon rank, tenure status, or administrative roles of the faculty members with whom they have reported collaborating. Here, an assessment professional's experiences with part-time or junior faculty members about academic assessment were just as valuable as are those who worked exclusively with higher ranking faculty. Because this research sought to describe assessment professionals' experiences with faculty, the research approach was intentionally broad to include all levels of contact with all types of faculty members. Due to the need for multiple perspectives related to assessment professionals experiences of working with faculty on assessment tasks, purposeful sampling was used to select the study's participants.

Purposeful sampling is a sampling procedure where research participants are selected based on a common characteristic (Patton, 1990). The goal of purposeful sampling is not the representative capture of all cases, but rather to gain a deeper understanding of analyzed cases (Babbie, 1992; Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006). Because faculty members all have varying roles within assessment, and assessment professionals will often work with selected faculty such as department and college designees responsible for representing the assessment interests of their units, purposeful sampling allowed for different perspectives to emerge (Coyne, 1997; Guest et al., 2006).

For this study, a maximum purposive sampling strategy was used starting with the list of institutions geographically located in West Texas and Eastern New Mexico. The range and type of institutions within this large geographical expanse include: community colleges; baccalaureate granting institutions; faith-based, private institutions, non-faith-based, private institutions; regional public institutions that grant bachelor's and master's degrees, and a large public research university that grants bachelor's, master's, and doctoral degrees. Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) recommend that qualitative researchers achieve maximum purposive sampling by selecting a range of settings, groups, or individuals to maximize the range of perspectives investigated in the study. Given the range of types of institutions and types of assessment and institutional effectiveness offices that exist within the region for this study, the sampling guidelines recommended by Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007) were satisfied.

Data Collection

Qualitative or interpretive research attempts to understand a phenomenon in terms of an individual's or a group of individuals' experiences (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Where empirical approaches emphasize the development of predictive models and theories leading to generalizable theories of social reality such as making cause and effect claims, qualitative research seeks to develop theories of social reality or explanations grounded in terms of peoples' experiences or rather their perceptions of or their meanings for their realities (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992; Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Because interpretive research is based on the descriptions of the participants, it is called *grounded research* (Glaser & Strauss, 1967; Straus & Corbin, 1998). Researchers applying a qualitative method tend to emphasize *thick description* where they begin describing surface layers of individuals' experiences and then advance to uncover deeper levels of meanings for their experiences (Geertz, 1973). Since individual's experiences tend to be the focus, there is more use of qualitative methods such as ethnography, in-depth interviews, and open-ended questionnaires in qualitative research (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). In most cases, data are collected by having people talk with a researcher and with others about their experiences. Qualitative research makes the researcher as much a part of the research process as the participants and the data they provide (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). In this sense, Lincoln and Guba (1985) argue that the qualitative researcher becomes the *instrument* when interpreting data from her participants.

Tools used for qualitative data collection include the researcher, interviews, field notes, researcher notes, observations, documents, and audio/visual materials (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2014). Interviews are defined as one-on-one question and answer

sessions where the researcher may use a variety of techniques (James, Milenkiewicz, & Bucknam, 2007). Field notes are written observations or explanations of phenomena at a single event (James et al., 2007). Researcher notes are handwritten or verbal accounts of an event, over time (James et al., 2007). Observations are notes that are often taken over a period of time by a variety of people (James et al., 2007). Documents and audio/visual materials are additional tools of qualitative data collection because they provide a record of events and activities that can be interpreted (James et al., 2007).

The researcher used a semi-structured interview format for participant interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Semi-structured interview questions tend to allow for more naturally occurring talk between interviewer and participant, tend to be less intrusive, and allow participants to ask questions of the interviewer. This interview style also permitted the researcher to ask relevant follow-up questions that emerged during the interviews (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). St. Pierre and Jackson (2014) discuss qualitative data collection in the context of interviewing participants, and they stated that the "authentic voices of participants are hallowed, treated reverently by researchers, as if their words can serve as a foundation of knowledge" (p. 715).

The interview guide that was used for the study consisted of open-ended questions about the participants' perceptions and experiences of working with faculty on academic assessment tasks. The interview guide contained a series of questions that were followed in a particular order within each interview (Back et al., 2002). The researcher referred to Glesne and Peshkin's (1992) recommendations for using the following open-ended question types: Grand Tour, Review Grand Tour, Retrospective, Literature-based, and Narrative to generate both broad and deep descriptions from interview participants. This

study utilized Grand Tour, Review Grand Tour, Retrospective, and Narrative questions in the interview guide. These forms of interview questions allow a researcher to begin understanding participants' experiences by first beginning with their broad descriptions of a given phenomenon (e.g., Grand Tour). Once a broad overview of a participant's experience is provided, the Review Grand Tour question step follows. Here, the researcher identifies aspects and events shared by the participants in their initial description that would seem important to the understanding of the participant's experiences. With each of the successive question types (e.g., Retrospective, Narrative, and Literature based), the researcher is interested in seeing the participant make connections between the various events and experiences described during the interview. For example, a researcher might ask a participant to *recall an assessment project* (Retrospective) to uncover or reveal collaborative patterns reproduced in the participant's approaches to working with faculty. Narrative-type questions can be revealing as well. In some cases, a person's experiences may be better understood as a sequence of events or as occurring chronologically, as a story or narrative. Responses to Narrative questions can reveal a participant's connections between events that might otherwise have been interpreted by the researcher as isolated or independent of one another.

Data Analysis

Data analysis involves organizing what the researcher has seen, heard, and read in order to make sense of the phenomenon being investigated (Glesne & Peshkin, 1992). Working with qualitative data, a researcher must categorize, synthesize, search for patterns, and interpret the data collected (Miles & Huberman, 1984; Strauss, 1987). The

qualitative researcher can then create explanations, develop theories, and link the researcher's story to other stories (Creswell, 2014).

Throughout all coding processes, the researcher used the constant comparative method to analyze the data collected. The constant comparative method utilizes close reading and re-reading of materials and intellectual comparison among categories of qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1997; Sivesind, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998).

After each interview was transcribed, the transcribed interview was entered as an individual data file into *NVivo*, which is a qualitative research software platform that allows qualitative researchers to code and categorize qualitative data (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014). These transcriptions were then coded using open coding techniques. Open coding refers to the initial phase of the coding process in the grounded theory approach to qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This initial stage of data analysis is called open coding because it is viewed as a process of *opening up* the data in order to uncover ideas and meanings as they unfold (Given, 2008). Open coding is a data condensation task that enables the researcher to retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble "chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily analyzable units" (Miles, et al., 2014, p. 73). *NVivo* coding "uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes. It may include folk or indigenous terms of a particular culture, subculture, or microculture to suggest the existence of the group's cultural categories" (Miles et al., 2014, p 74). After initial open coding concluded, axial coding begin. During the process of axial coding, connections are made among the categories and subcategories (Given, 2008). After axial coding was

completed, subcoding took place. A subcode is a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry (Miles et al., 2014, p. 80).

Trustworthiness

Qualitative researchers focus on trustworthiness in order to reduce the likelihood of misinterpretation of the data (Joniak, 1994). To achieve trustworthiness, Lincoln and Guba (1985) propose four foundational constructs related to the trustworthiness of qualitative studies: 1) credibility, 2) transferability, 3) dependability, and 4) confirmability. The first construct, credibility, is to demonstrate that the research inquiry was conducted in such a manner that the subject was accurately described and identified. The second construct, transferability, aims to demonstrate the applicability of study findings from one setting to another. The third construct is dependability, or consistency of findings. The final construct, confirmability, stresses whether the findings of the study could be confirmed by another researcher.

To advance credibility of the study, the researcher used member checking procedures. Prior to entering each transcribed interview into NVivo, each transcript was sent to each participant to confirm whether the researcher correctly transcribed the interview (Creswell, 2009; Creswell, Hanson, Plano & Morales, 2007). This process of member checking ensures that the transcribed data meets the principle of trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009).

The researcher helped ensure transferability of the study by using thick, rich description of the individual participant cases (Creswell, 2013). Vivid language, active verbs, and participant dialogue were used to describe the context and content of the participants' language. The researcher also implemented Morrow's (2005) dependability

recommendation by urging participants to ask questions if unfamiliar terminology was used during the interview. Participants received an information sheet, which provided a definition of terms, further ensuring that all parties had mutual understanding of terms.

Dependability, or consistency of findings, was achieved by relying on the researcher's field notes (Charmaz, 2000). Using field notes to analyze consistency of findings is a technique documented by James et al. (2007) to ensure that qualitative researchers are engaged in continuous evaluation and re-evaluation of qualitative data. To ensure confirmability, researcher notes and dialogue with peer de-briefers about coding techniques was used to determine if the findings of this study could be confirmed by an independent researcher (Creswell, 2014; Merriam, 2014).

Context of the Study and Researcher

Context of the Study

Kuh et al. (2015), the foremost scholars on academic assessment practices and philosophy, advocate for moving from a compliance model of assessment to one focused on improving students' education experiences. This shift in assessment ideology has practical implications for assessment professionals. Fostering reliable and valid institutional assessment practices means building a community of engaged assessment professionals and faculty who are willing to work collaboratively toward improving both student learning and institutional performance (Beld, 2013; Patton, 1990). This qualitative collective case study focused on six assessment professionals who worked at higher education institutions within the West Texas and Eastern New Mexico regions.

Context of the Researcher

At the time of this study, I work as an assessment professional as Director of the Office of Planning and Assessment at Texas Tech University. In 2008, I started as an Analyst in the Office of Planning and Assessment; in 2009, I became Associate Director of this office, and in 2011, I became Director. I have now been Director of the Office of Planning and Assessment for four years, and it has been a complicated journey with many challenges related to academic assessment and institutional accreditation.

I have held many positions in higher education since I started my career in 1996, but there has always been some connection to assessment or institutional effectiveness. I never purposefully sought a career as an assessment professional. After completion of my master's degree, my first professional job was Coordinator of Institutional Research at Red Rocks Community College (Lakewood, CO). At Red Rocks, I learned about the practice of institutional effectiveness from my supervisor, and I served on the college's self-study group. In this position, I learned about the large-scale efforts required for institutional accreditation.

After working at Red Rocks for two years, I moved to a Communication, Marketing, and Institutional Research Coordinator position at the Higher Education and Advanced Technology (HEAT) Center at the former Lowry Air Force Base in Denver, CO. In this position, I was a *jack-of-all-trades*, and I did everything from student recruitment to creating publications to analysis of institutional research data. I served as a member of HEAT's Assessment Council, and I routinely provided retention data and student enrollment data to the Council's members.

My husband and I moved to Lubbock, TX in 2000, and I happily joined South Plains College (Levelland, TX) as a Speech and Communications instructor. I taught at South Plains College from 2000 – 2005, and was a tenured Assistant Professor when I left the college in 2005. Leaving South Plains College was a difficult decision for me, but I decided that I needed to travel less so that I could be closer to our three young children. At South Plains College, I did not have a formal connection to assessment, but I knew as a young faculty member that assessment was important.

In 2005, I began teaching as a full-time lecturer at Texas Tech's College of Business. I taught five sections of a Managerial Communications course. I missed the community college environment, yet I knew that this job opportunity offered a good situation for my family. In 2006, I developed a conference presentation about assessment data that I collected within the Managerial Communications course. This conference presentation was my first opportunity to formally study assessment techniques. In 2007, I applied to Texas Tech's Higher Education doctoral program, and began taking courses part-time in Fall 2007, while still continuing to work full-time within the College of Business. A professor within the Higher Education program asked if I would be willing to volunteer with a new office (Planning and Assessment) that she was creating on the Texas Tech campus, and that is where my journey with assessment escalated. I volunteered for the Office of Planning and Assessment for about six months, while I continued to teach full-time. Eventually, though, in 2008, I left my full-time job in the College of Business for a full-time job as an Analyst in the Office of Planning and Assessment.

While in my first role in 2008, Texas Tech University was on probation with its regional accrediting body, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Because of the university's probationary period, I am sensitive to both the institutional context where assessment occurs, and how institutional circumstances and situations can influence the extent to which faculty value assessment. I am also sensitive to faculty involvement in assessment. In 2008, assessment practices were very spotty across campus. As of 2015, most academic colleges are engaged in systematic, discipline-specific assessment initiatives. I realize that individual institutions have idiosyncratic approaches to assessment, and executive campus executive leadership may partially or wholly influence the assessment climate of the institution.

Clearly, I have a close relationship with this topic. I view this closeness as advantageous, because I value student learning and I myself have a professional stake in documenting academic assessment activities. My closeness to this topic is neither objective nor neutral. Because of my professional experiences in academic assessment, I feel that it is important to contribute and/or begin the scholarship related to the specific roles that assessment professionals play in the important work surrounding academic assessment. Many times, I have felt the pressure of this work on my own shoulders. For example, if I am unsuccessful in my efforts to persuade faculty to conduct assessments in their own classrooms, I will also be unsuccessful in drafting evidentiary documents to Texas Tech's accrediting body, SACSCOC. Success in my job as an assessment professional, like the other assessment professionals I interviewed, is almost 100% dependent on my ability to persuade stakeholders, usually faculty members, of the value

of assessment. At times, working as an assessment professional is almost like a sales job or even a cheerleader. I am constantly communicating about how much assessment is valued by Texas Tech University, by the state of Texas, by disciplinary accrediting bodies, by parents, and even by students.

I never set out to become an assessment professional in my career, and my entry into the world of assessment occurred as fate would have had it. I empathize with assessment professionals and the pressures they face on a daily basis, especially when they are in the midst of an institutional accreditation review. Despite the risks that are inherent with this career, I love the challenge and rigor of working with faculty.

Summary

This qualitative collective case study expanded on the role of assessment professionals and their collaborations with faculty members. This study described how assessment professionals worked collaboratively with faculty members to gain compliance on academic assessment tasks. The researcher will conduct interviews using a semi-structured interview guide. Data analysis will be conducted using open coding, axial coding, subcoding, and NVivo coding. Trustworthiness will be achieved through rich description, researcher notes, member checking, and peer de-briefing. Chapter IV will report on the study's findings.

CHAPTER IV

RESULTS

Chapter IV presents the results of the study. The topics that will be discussed include: 1) summary of the research design, 2) profile of study institutions and participants, and 3) the study's findings. The purpose of this study was to explore how assessment professionals described their efforts to work collaboratively with faculty members in order to gain compliance on academic assessment tasks. Understanding how assessment professionals communicate directly with faculty members is unstudied, yet it is an important phenomenon to explore, due to the high stakes associated with higher education accountability and assessment. Downs (2014) has started to investigate some of the politics, psychology, and symbols surrounding how faculty members work with assessment professionals to complete assessment initiatives, yet his research does not specifically hone in on the strategies that assessment professionals use with faculty. Fuller and Beck's (2015) nation-wide report on the Faculty Survey of Assessment Culture found that faculty members have mixed feelings about the extent to which they value assessment, but this large-scale report did not investigate how assessment professionals work collaboratively with faculty.

This study was guided by the following four (4) research questions:

1. How do higher education assessment professionals describe their experiences collaborating with faculty on academic assessment?
2. How do assessment professionals describe faculty commitment to academic assessment in relationship to their other traditional professional obligations (teaching, research, and service)?

3. How do assessment professionals describe faculty roles and contributions to program, course, and institutional academic assessment processes?
4. What are best practices for effectively collaborating with faculty on academic assessment?

Summary of the Research Design

This qualitative research study was conducted through the lens of interpretivist inquiry. A collective case study research design was used to study how assessment professionals work collaboratively with faculty members (Baxter & Jack, 2008). The collective case study design allowed the researcher to gather data from the perspective of multiple interrelated cases (Creswell, 2014). Before collecting data for this study, formal approval was received from the Texas Tech University Human Subjects Review Board (see Appendix A).

Data Collection

Data was collected through the researcher's lens, semi-structured interviews, and researcher notes. The first step in the data collection process was to collect the names and contact information of assessment professionals located in West Texas and Eastern New Mexico from institutional assessment office websites. Potential participants were recruited from the following institutions within the West Texas and Eastern New Mexico regions: West Texas A&M University, Amarillo College, South Plains College, Lubbock Christian University, Abilene Christian University, South Plains College, University of Texas Permian Basin, New Mexico Junior College, Angelo State University, Eastern New Mexico University, and Wayland Baptist University. Inclusion criteria for participants in this study were that they are higher education assessment professionals

who have some level of responsibility for academic assessment projects or initiatives at their college or university. Each targeted participant's home institution website was searched, in order to locate the potential participant's name and contact information. An email explaining the study and an Information Sheet (see Appendices B and C) were sent directly to 11 potential participants.

Potential participants who did not initially respond to the email invitation to participate in the study were contacted two additional times for recruitment purposes. Out of the 11, a total of six responded and agreed to participate in the study. Interview dates and times were set up through email with all six participants. Prior to the interview, all six participants were emailed an additional copy of the Information Sheet.

Depending on the participant's preference, semi-structured interviews were conducted via telephone or in-person. All interviews used an identical question protocol (see Appendix D), although each interview was unique in terms of informal conversation. Participants had the opportunity to ask questions regarding the study during the interview, and participants were verbally informed that that their participation was voluntary, and that the interview could be stopped at any point during the interview. If participants did not feel comfortable answering any of the questions, they were verbally informed that they could skip them. All six participants consented to audio recording of his or her interview. The interview protocol used asked for participants to select a pseudonym. All but two of the participants identified pseudonyms; those two participants were assigned a pseudonym by the researcher. With participants' approval, the interviews were audio recorded. All six of the participants remained for the entire duration of each interview. Interviews ranged in length from 60 minutes to 130 minutes.

With the exception of one interview, all interviews were transcribed and entered as individual data files into NVivo. NVivo is a qualitative research software platform that allows qualitative researchers to code and categorize qualitative data (Miles et al., 2014). The interview that was not transcribed was due to technical audio difficulties that made transcription not feasible. Therefore, for this particular case, the researcher used her field notes to recall the details of the interview. The field notes were then entered into NVivo and subsequently coded and categorized like the other interviews. Prior to entering each transcribed interview into NVivo, each transcript was sent to each participant to confirm whether the researcher correctly transcribed the interview. (Creswell, 2009; Creswell, Hanson, Plano & Morales, 2007). This process of member checking ensured that the transcribed data met the principle of trustworthiness (Creswell, 2009).

In addition to member checking, the researcher followed procedures for ensuring the qualitative reliability of the interview transcriptions (Gibbs, 2007). The researcher checked the transcripts to make sure there were no obvious mistakes, and the researcher re-read each transcript multiple times to ensure that the transcript was complete (Gibbs, 2007). Participants were provided an opportunity to add any further details or comments and/or to correct any misunderstandings in their interview transcripts. None of the participants added any further details or comments to the transcript.

The constant comparative method of data analysis was utilized throughout the data collection and analysis processes. This method utilizes close reading and re-reading of materials and intellectual comparison among categories of qualitative data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985; Schwandt, 1997; Sivesind, 1999; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). Interview

transcriptions were coded using open coding techniques. Open coding refers to the initial phase of the coding process in the grounded theory approach to qualitative research (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This initial stage of data analysis is called open coding because it is viewed as a process of *opening up* the data in order to uncover ideas and meanings as it unfolds (Given, 2008). Open coding is a data condensation task that enables the researcher to retrieve the most meaningful material, to assemble "chunks of data that go together, and to further condense the bulk into readily analyzable units" (Miles, Huberman, & Saldana, 2014, p. 73). Coding was conducted by using *NVivo,* a qualitative data analysis computer software program (Miles et al., 2014). *NVivo* coding "uses words or short phrases from the participant's own language in the data record as codes. It may include folk or indigenous terms of a particular culture, subculture, or microculture to suggest the existence of the group's cultural categories" (Miles et al., 2014, p 74). *NVivo* coding "prioritizes and honor[s] the participant's voice," so therefore the researcher sought to maintain the integrity of participant responses while developing all codes (Bogdan & Biklen, 1992, p. 13).

After open coding concluded, axial coding began. During the process of axial coding, connections are made among the categories and subcategories (Given, 2008). After axial coding was completed, several subcodes emerged. A subcode is a second-order tag assigned after a primary code to detail or enrich the entry (Miles et al., 2014, p. 80). Because the first research question described how assessment professionals collaborated with assessment professionals, the emergent subcodes were coded as contextual themes. Subcodes that emerged from research question two were coded as employment-related themes, because the participants described how faculty characterized

assessment practices. The third research question described how faculty contributed to assessment processes, so the emerging subcodes were coded as process themes. Because participants shared recommendations about strategies that they employed to gain compliance on academic assessment tasks, these subcodes were coded as recommendation themes to address research question four.

Study Institutions and Participant Profiles

Lincoln and Guba (1985) posit that interpretive inquiry brings together the context of the researcher and the context of the participants. Interpretivist inquiry introduces a range of strategic, ethical, and personal issues into the qualitative research process (Locke, Spirduso, & Silverman, 2007). All of the study institutions were accredited by the Higher Learning Commission (HLC) or the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Community Colleges A and B both served students in the West Texas and Panhandle regions of Texas. Community College C served students in the Eastern New Mexico region. College D is a private, faith-based institution that grants bachelor’s, master’s, and doctoral degrees in the West Texas region. College E is a private, faith-based institution that grants bachelor’s and master’s degrees in the West Texas region. College F is a public institution located in the Eastern New Mexico region that grants associate and bachelor’s degrees.

The participants in this study were purposefully selected based upon their roles as assessment professionals and the geographic location of their institution in West Texas or Eastern New Mexico, from within the study institutions described above. There were a total of six participants in this study; half of the participants were male and the remaining

half were female. The average age of the participants was 47 years. Most of the participants were responsible for overseeing a small staff, generally two to three other employees. Half of the participants were responsible for overseeing the general education/core curriculum assessment initiatives at their respective institutions, whereas all participants had responsibility for ensuring that their institution's certificate and/or degree programs reported and documented assessment data. All of the participants described daily work related to their regional accrediting agency. Daily accreditation work was generally described as ensuring that their home institution was in compliance with the standards of the institution's accrediting body, which one participant described as a "watchdog position." Only two participants described that they were named to formal accreditation roles at their institutions (i.e., accreditation liaison for their institution).

All of the participants served in a leadership role within their institution's assessment decision-making structure. One of the participants served as the chair of her institution's Assessment Council, and another served as chair of his institution's Institutional Effectiveness Committee. Job titles of the participants were also variable – no two job titles were the same. Many of the job titles incorporated some iteration of accountability, institutional effectiveness, planning, and/or academic assessment within the job title itself. It should be noted that one of the participants also had responsibility for overseeing student affairs and co-curricular assessment, in addition to academic assessment. There was not a clear, overarching, one-size-fits-all reporting line for the participants. They reported to a variety of positions including deans, vice presidents, Provost, and the President.

Half of the participants were employed at community colleges and half worked at four-year colleges or universities. Half of the participants also worked in some sort of instructional role at their institution. Of the six participants, two participants were tenured faculty who identified their assessment role as equally as important as their faculty role. In addition, two participants taught adjunct courses at their home institution, and the remaining two participants did not have any instructional roles at their current institutions; however, all of the participants did have former college-level teaching experience. Profiles of the participants are provided below.

Norm (College D) is employed at a medium-sized, faith-based higher education institution as the accreditation liaison. Norm is a tenured faculty member in addition to his administrative duties to oversee academic assessment. In addition to his 50% assessment role, Norm maintains a regular teaching and research schedule. He has been employed at his institution for 25 years at the time of this study.

Rose (College B) is employed at a medium-sized community college as a full-time staff member. Rose has college teaching experience, although she does not teach at her home institution. Rose supervises three full-time staff within the academic affairs function at her institution, and her primary responsibility is to oversee academic assessment. Rose has worked at her institution for seven years at the time of this study.

Tom (College E) is a tenured faculty member at a medium-sized, faith-based higher education institution. Working in his present assessment capacity for the past five years, Tom maintains a reduced teaching schedule. Tom is active within the higher education local assessment community, and he has been employed at his institution for 15 years at the time of this study.

Bob (College F) works as a full-time staff member at a medium-sized public higher education institution. Bob regularly teaches adjunct courses in his discipline, but his primary responsibility is to serve the institution as the accreditation liaison. Bob supervises two full-time staff members, and he has been employed at his institution for seven years at the time of this study.

Shari (College A) is a full-time staff member at a medium-sized community college. Shari does not have any teaching responsibilities at her institution, although she does have past college-level teaching experience. Shari had been employed by her institution for two years at the time of this study, and she does not supervise any employees.

Jerry (College C) is a full-time staff member at a medium-sized community college. Jerry is the institutional accreditation liaison at the institution, and he supervises one employee within the college's institutional effectiveness office. Jerry has former teaching experience, but he does not currently have any teaching responsibilities. Jerry has been working at his institution for six years at the time of this study.

Findings

Experiences Collaborating with Faculty on Academic Assessment

The first research question sought to describe the ways in which higher education assessment professionals collaborated with faculty on academic assessment tasks. The analysis of the data collected to address this research question produced three distinct themes: 1) tension is present among assessment professionals and faculty, 2) power imbalances between faculty and assessment professionals affects compliance, and 3) communicating reciprocity to faculty is a helpful compliance strategy. The study

participants passionately described their experiences collaborating with faculty on academic assessment. When participants described how they collaborated with faculty, they generally described interactions that were frustrating. This frustration often led them to collaborate strategically with faculty members in order to complete the task at hand.

Tension is present among assessment professionals and faculty. The first theme that emerged from the analysis of data was that tension is present among assessment professionals and faculty. All of the participants supported these findings, perhaps with the greatest frequency and intensity than all other themes that emerged. Some of the descriptive statements they used to describe the tension they have experienced in working with faculty include “negative,” “frustrating,” “difficult, if not impossible at times,” “it’s like pulling teeth working with faculty,” “they [faculty] despise this type of work,” and “impossible.”

These descriptions of the tensions that exist are indicative of what the participants deal with when working with some faculty on assessment tasks. Rose discussed how faculty guard their “assessment power” closely, and “even if I suggest a different way of administering an assessment, it’s still faculty, who have the choice to do what they want to do.” This tension was also reported by Bob, who shared that tension exists “when the rubber hits the road with assessment, I can only guide, not prescribe.”

One of the participants, Tom, discussed a story that provides a further example of tension between assessment professionals and faculty. Tom described his institution’s syllabus policy as unpopular with faculty, and that faculty are “resentful” of this requirement. Because faculty are required to submit their course syllabi to his office,

Tom perceives that the institution's policy directly contributes to the tension he feels between him and faculty.

Shari described her relationship with some faculty members as "hostile" and "strained." She has found that gaining compliance with her office's expectations was "next-to-impossible" from some faculty members, and that she routinely resorted to "tattletaling." In other words, Shari's own efforts to gain the compliance of some faculty members failed, and she had to rely on the power of those above her to "bully" faculty members to submit their assessment reports. The bullying behavior that Shari described was:

> …unfortunately, necessary because they won't do it unless the VP [vice president] tells them they have to do it. Even when I tell their chairperson that they've not met our requirements, I still get nothing. Magically, though, when the VP [vice president] knows about it, it gets done.

Power imbalances between faculty and assessment professionals affects compliance. The second theme that emerged was that power imbalances between faculty and assessment professionals affects compliance. All of the participants acknowledged that faculty possess the power to complete assessment tasks, but administrators carry the burden of compliance, resulting in an imbalance of power between these two employee groups. Assessment professionals are responsible for compliance, yet faculty are the *only* employees who can do the work necessary to achieve compliance. Norm remarked about how his encounters with faculty are limited to "advising on research-based assessment methods, analysis of results, and documenting improvements. No one wants to talk about improvements – they [faculty] presume that they know best and why in the world would I

even suggest improvements?" Norm went on to say that he sees his role as "equal with faculty," yet faculty can ultimately choose to "take or leave" his professional advice on assessment methodologies or other ways of completing assessment tasks.

Rose discussed how faculty take a while "to warm up" to her because they are concerned that she is going to "tell on them" when their assessment results are not positive. She described one scenario where the faculty member seemed "suspicious" of her – almost as if she worked in an internal audit capacity rather than as a higher education professional whose primary professional goal was to measure and document student learning, and to propose ways to "improve student learning and even touch student lives." Rose described how it might take a few meetings with faculty to explain her professional role and to emphasize that she is not "here to threaten" or to "tell them what to do." Rose described that she tries to work with faculty in a way that is more "advisory" than ever "dictatorial."

Bob and Tom both shared stories about faculty members who are resistant to complete assessment tasks, further supporting the theme of imbalance between faculty and assessment professionals. Tom said that he has been accused of "going to the dark side" because he now occupies an administrative role as opposed to a pure instructional role. Because he's perceived as an administrator, he thinks that "some faculty second-guess" him. When describing job responsibilities, Bob identified that the role of an assessment professional is one that "comes with a lot of headaches because we have to ask…require really…faculty to do something that they never signed up to do." These responses confirm that assessment professionals echoed how power imbalances affects

compliance, largely because faculty possess the power to complete the assessment tasks, but assessment professionals carry the burden of compliance.

Communicating reciprocity to faculty is a helpful compliance strategy. Communicating reciprocity to faculty is a helpful compliance strategy was the final theme that emerged from the analysis of the data. A majority of the participants described specific interactions when reciprocity was offered as a direct compliance strategy. In many instances, the assessment professional intentionally offered something in return for completion of the assessment task. Some of the assessment professionals described reciprocity as their best strategy for achieving faculty compliance on an academic assessment task.

Tom shared his experiences with how he evolved to utilize reciprocity to obtain compliance. He shared that he had initially thought that when he joined an assessment role that he "could charm everyone when I started out here, and then I soon got covered up with all of the under-performers," and he had to "offer them something that would keep them motivated to keep going." Tom shared that as a current faculty member, he could definitely empathize with his faculty colleagues and their busy schedules, but he needed to provide faculty with something that motivated them. To keep faculty engaged in a campus assessment project, Tom found that offering professional development opportunities was something of value to faculty. Tom spoke at length about how "faculty don't have training in assessment," and "continuous, on-going assessment training is something that we invest in at our campus." He acknowledged that though he could pay faculty to take part in professional development, he genuinely perceived that offering professional development sessions was helpful, advantageous, and reciprocal.

Another participant, Bob, communicated reciprocity by providing faculty with course-level and program-level assessment data, even though faculty didn't expect or even ask for assessment reports in return. This unspoken reciprocity was described by Bob, who said that faculty reacted in a genuinely surprised and grateful manner.

Reciprocity was also confirmed by Shari and Rose as a helpful compliance strategy. As a way of expressing her appreciation for a chairperson's submission of assessment data, Shari said that she organized a rubric workshop. Rose also used reciprocity as a compliance strategy; Rose said that she would routinely bring "giveaway items to faculty meetings…anything I can do to get them [faculty] to pay attention."

Summary of experiences collaborating with faculty on academic assessment. To summarize, research question one resulted in the following themes: 1) tension is present among assessment professionals and faculty; 2) power imbalances between faculty and assessment professionals affects compliance, and 3) communicating reciprocity to faculty can be a helpful strategy for assessment professionals to gain compliance with assessment tasks.

Descriptions of Faculty Commitment to Academic Assessment

The second research question sought to describe how assessment professionals described faculty commitment to academic assessment in relationship to their other professional obligations and roles. After analysis of the data collected to address this research question, three themes emerged: 1) academic assessment is a new job-related expectation for faculty; 2) faculty are more responsive when their direct supervisor is aware of the assessment task, and 3) it is important to communicate flexibility and supportiveness to build greater commitment to academic assessment.

Participants described stories that illustrated how faculty members did not prioritize academic assessment tasks as compared to their other job-related expectations. Similar to the findings described from research question one, all of the participants characterized their experiences with faculty members as frustrating. However, these descriptions were also tempered by empathy. In most cases, the assessment professionals offered justifications and/or reasons for why faculty were warranted in their frustration with assessment activities.

Academic assessment is a new job-related expectation for faculty. The first theme that emerged is that academic assessment is a new job-related expectation for faculty. All participants seemed to communicate, with fairly high intensity, that academic assessment places a burden on faculty members in which they receive very little benefit. Only one participant, Bob, indicated that academic assessment is part of the faculty job description at his institution. Most participants remarked that it is not entirely surprising that faculty resist assessment because they have little benefit to doing it, other than to "check it off their list," (Norm). Rose said that "it's frustrating for them because it's not part of what really matters here…our faculty are here to teach first, and department chairs just want to get assessment done as quickly and as easily as they can…it's not a part of the faculty contract to assess student learning."

Academic assessment as a new faculty job requirement was described extensively among the participants. Tom acknowledged that academic assessment is probably "at the bottom of the list of responsibilities for our faculty, who are also supposed to be relevant in our local community and building research programs." Another participant, Jerry, confirmed this theme by describing a lack of awareness and disinterest among the faculty

at his institution, because they've "got other things to do." All interviewees conveyed that academic assessment was not a skill that their faculty seemed to know much about, and as Jerry said "they weren't taught how to assess student learning in their graduate program, so it's a challenge to try to teach our faculty skills and concepts that they don't care to learn." Because assessment isn't "spelled out in the job description," Shari said that the faculty at her institution act "begrudgingly" when they're asked to assist with an institution-wide assessment project."

The participants all asserted that faculty do not perceive academic assessment as a valued part of their faculty role, yet they all empathized with them. Interestingly, Norm said that he didn't "blame them for feeling frustrated because there's a lot of pressure for our faculty to teach more, research more, and do more, more, more." Rose reiterated this theme when she said that:

> …they've got a lot on their plate, and then when I show up to ask them to submit their assessment report by a certain date, I can see the wheels turning in their head about how they're going to get it all done.

Tom also corroborated these empathy feelings by stating that "it's kind of like assessment is other duties as assigned to the faculty because it's not in their job description but if it doesn't get done… well the department is in hot water." Norm also stated that "it's [assessment] one more thing that doesn't get counted toward their status, so it stands to reason that it isn't a top priority." Although all participants acknowledged that faculty were frustrating to work with, they excused the faculty for having to complete a task that was not an explicit part of their job description.

Faculty are more responsive when their direct supervisor is aware of the assessment task. The second theme that emerged is that faculty are more responsive when their direct supervisor is aware of the assessment task. Half of the participants described unique situations, stories, or circumstances where faculty were more responsive to completing assessment tasks because their assessment report was known to be shared with a supervisor. Some of the participants described this strategy as intentional, and Bob specifically described supervisor notification as a "last-ditch effort" to achieve compliance. This strategy was documented by Bob, Norm and Tom. Norm said, "you know, the best times for me are when I tell the faculty that their reports will be submitted to the President." Tom said that his institution's assessment schedule includes an executive report prepared for the President and includes excerpts from each of the programs under review. Further, Bob said that when he is unable to get a faculty member to respond to his request for assessment data, he copies in the Dean on an email. Bob described this situation as "atypical," but the faculty member had assessment data that was "a missing piece of the Compliance Report…so I had to have it."

While half of the participants used this strategy as a method to help them achieve compliance on a specific task, the remaining participants used this exact strategy to build goodwill. Rose, Shari, and Jerry didn't discuss how this strategy helped them to achieve compliance on a specific task, but they did remark how sharing a faculty member's commitment to assessment with his/her supervisor may have indirectly helped to "build bridges" with the assessment office and the department (Shari). Rose said that her department tried to emphasize faculty contributions to assessment by including their accomplishments in a campus-wide newsletter. Shari said that she often writes "email

thank you notes to faculty" and she also "consciously includes their director." Jerry said that "I try to keep our VPI [Vice President for Instruction] informed about who's going above and beyond the call of duty."

The emergence of this theme in the interview data revealed two opposing approaches to gaining faculty compliance on assessment tasks. Informing a faculty member's supervisor about the assessment task was used by Bob, Tom, and Norm as an intentional strategy to pressure faculty members to complete their assessment tasks. On the other hand, Rose, Shari, and Jerry used this same strategy to build goodwill and to encourage faculty members to continue their commitment to academic assessment.

It is important to communicate flexibility and supportiveness to build greater commitment to academic assessment. The final theme that emerged from the analysis of data is that it is important to communicate flexibility and supportiveness to build greater commitment to academic assessment. All participants discussed the advantages of an open and/or flexible style when working with faculty, especially under unique departmental and/or institutional circumstances. However, some of the participants emphasized that they experienced varying levels of success when they were too open or too flexible. For example, when Shari discussed how she communicates assessment deadline expectations to faculty members, she often emphasized that faculty could use their existing disciplinary-based accrediting body as a starting place to collect and analyze assessment data. Shari's open communication style was "helpful in these kinds of circumstances." On the other hand, when working with a faculty member whose discipline does not have an accrediting body, Shari found this open style of communication to be too permissive, because faculty didn't know how to begin assessing

student learning or couldn't "wrap their heads around the idea that they could do this however they want to."

Norm, Rose, and Tom all described more prescriptive communication styles when working with faculty. Although Norm said that he really doesn't "dictate much of anything," he instead provides firm deadlines that are "more-or-less" followed. Rose's office has a checklist that she says "lays out everything they [faculty] need to do," so her communication with faculty focuses more on accomplishing tasks. Rose said "they've just got to do it and that's what I tell them." Tom's communication with faculty members is also fairly prescriptive because he says that he "gives them a deadline and the rest is up to them." Norm, Rose, and Tom all seemed to rely on their institution's and/or office's procedures for reporting assessment activities. Their communication interactions were grounded in policy, and the manner in which faculty reported their activities was essentially left to the faculty to determine for themselves.

Jerry flat-out said that an open and/or flexible approach to assessment reporting with his faculty would "probably lead to disaster." The faculty members that Jerry routinely worked with were busy with their labs and were looking for "their next big grant" and they wouldn't "give a hoot about assessment." Therefore, Jerry said that he regularly communicated reporting deadlines, often months in advance, and he offered little to no flexibility with regard to deadlines. Jerry acknowledged that his faculty will probably never take assessment as seriously as their teaching, but he doesn't want to give them an opportunity to "slack."

Participants further shared their stories about communicating flexibility and supportiveness to faculty members, especially with regard to a department's unique set of

circumstances. For example, Jerry described a discipline-based accrediting agency's on-site visit and the department's need to re-align student learning outcomes according to a new set of prescriptive standards. Because of the compulsory nature of these standards, it was necessary for the department to re-design all of its student learning outcomes in a short period of time. Jerry described how the assessment staff at his institution extended deadlines and provided assessment consultation in response to this situation. Another participant, Bob, described a situation that was resolved because he reacted flexibly to a department's circumstance. Bob explained how the hiring of a new chairperson in an academic department resulted in a "near riot," because the chairperson wanted to unilaterally change the department's assessment plan without any faculty involvement. Bob described that the chairperson sought out his [Bob's] guidance on the department's assessment plan, and Bob concurred with the new chairperson's analysis of the situation. Because the chairperson planned on overhauling the assessment plan, Bob granted the chair some additional time to comply with the university's assessment reporting requirements. Tom also described a story when he needed to respond flexibly to a department's insistence on using indirect student learning measures in its assessment report. Tom shared that the department was known to be "conflict-prone and people were at each other's throats" and that the department generally could not reach consensus on many issues. To resolve the situation, Tom said that the chair called him to discuss the department's assessment report, and that faculty members were insistent upon using a particular measure within their report. Although the chair knew that this assessment method wasn't sound, Tom conceded that if the department stood behind this method, then he would, too.

Summary of faculty commitment to academic assessment. To summarize, research question two resulted in the following themes: 1) academic assessment is a new job-related expectation for faculty; 2) faculty are more responsive when their direct supervisor is aware of the assessment task, and 3) it is important to communicate flexibility and supportiveness to build greater commitment to academic assessment.

Faculty Contributions to Academic Assessment

The third research question sought to describe how assessment professionals explained faculty contributions to various levels of course, program, and institutional assessment. After analysis of the data collected to address this research question, two themes emerged: 1) faculty participate in all levels of assessment, and 2) faculty are engaged in academic assessment tasks when a discipline-based connection is present.

Participants described stories that demonstrated how faculty members participated in all levels of assessment. These stories support that faculty are essential to the successful efforts of institutional assessment efforts because they participate in course-level, program-level, and institution-level academic assessment. The participants described several examples of heightened faculty engagement in assessment tasks when a discipline-based connection was present.

Faculty participate in all levels of assessment. The first theme that emerged was that faculty participate in all levels of assessment. All participants shared the extent to which they depended upon faculty for documenting student learning at the course, program, and institutional level, and all participants discussed how faculty were critical to the work for which they are responsible. All participants offered copious examples of the extent to which faculty contribute to the academic assessment process at their institutions.

Whether it be "graduation surveys, employment rates, or assessing the same essay from one section of a course to the next," (Tom), all participants explained how they interacted with faculty at these various levels of assessment. Shari discussed many examples of program-level and course-level faculty involvement. Shari said that:

> …they often come to me to help them get started with course assessment, and they also want to know how I can help them with pre-tests and post-tests. Some faculty want to know about how course assessment feeds into program assessment, so we work on making an assessment plan for the department.

Another participant, Rose, described the extent to which she worked with faculty on program-level assessment. Rose said that she "works with faculty all the time on program level assessment, especially because that's really all our accreditor cares about," so it is a priority and she "somewhat prioritizes" it. Rose also commented on the degree to which she emphasizes to faculty that they needed to document "student learning within the degree." In terms of the ways in which faculty contributed to program level assessment, she said that faculty at her institution used "comprehensive exam pass rates, graduation surveys, qualifying exam pass rates, and doctoral defense rates" to measure program level contributions to assessment.

Bob described the various levels of faculty participation at the course, program, and institutional level. Bob said that "department chairs really care about the sum of the whole…at the program." Bob listed many contributions that faculty make to program-level assessment:

> …they conduct follow-up surveys by phone to check on their graduates, and many of our programs go to great lengths to see how their students are performing on the job…some programs will call up our local employers.

Bob also discussed the contributions that faculty add to course-level assessment, which are "up to faculty to determine but I recommend performance-based assessments and course-embedded assessments." To further explain how faculty contribute to institutional assessment, Bob explicitly shared how faculty contribute to institutional assessment, which "is [institutional assessment] probably our big problem area because they don't get anything in return." Bob said that his institution has considered implementing an institution-wide "assessment day," where presumably the institution conducts its institutional assessment on a single day, but that he doesn't think it will "ever be implemented."

Tom, too, further described how faculty participated in all levels of assessment. Tom explained how the faculty at this institution report on a rotational schedule, so that "faculty know exactly when and what they need to report" from year to year. However, Tom said that assessment documentation "falls mainly to the department head" at his home institution, and it's "really the department head's prerogative in terms of how much he wants to involve the faculty." Tom said that this approach worked well at his institution, and that it "empowers" the department chair to conduct assessment practices in a way that "makes sense for the department." At Tom's institution, institutional level assessment is led by the Chief Academic Officer, and is mandatory. Tom said that "we usually don't involve our faculty….students get an email that requires them to participate in an assessment activity, and they generally comply."

Norm also shared examples of faculty participation in institutional level assessment. Norm's office leads his institution's institutional level assessment practices, and program level and course level assessment are "left to faculty." In Norm's role, he said that he often "advises on program and course assessment" by offering short courses and programs on assessment. At the institutional level, Norm identified courses that faculty were teaching within any given semester, and he "asks them to participate in the process." Norm said that "sometimes they decline, but for the most part they give up one course meeting so I can administer the assessment."

Faculty are engaged in assessment when a discipline-based connection is present. The second theme that emerged was that faculty are engaged in assessment when a discipline-based connection is present. Most of the participants described how faculty are engaged in academic assessment tasks when there is a discipline-based connection. For example, participants shared stories about how they worked side-by-side with faculty members when they were seeking initial accreditation from a disciplinary agency, or when they were maintaining disciplinary accreditation through a site visit or preparing a self-study report. Norm said that he "enjoys" working with faculty when their accrediting body mandated they produce student learning assessment results. In these cases, Norm said that the faculty really "get why they should pay attention to assessment. It's not an accountability tactic, but it matters to them when they see that their own accreditation hinges on assessment." Rose also shared a story about a department that was late in producing documentation for its discipline-based self-study report. Rose said:

> …the department waited until the last minute to try to assemble their assessment results, and it wasn't until they came to my office that they could make sense of what….kinds of information were being asked of them. They hadn't been collecting any assessment information in a systematic kind of way, so I helped them piece their student learning outcomes together.

Another participant, Bob, offered a narrative about how faculty are engaged in assessment when a discipline-based connection is present. Bob explained how he helped a department chair with a required HLC report; this particular department was hoping to add a "new degree" and the HLC report mandated that the department produce student learning outcomes and assessment evidence for several consecutive years. Bob said that the department had "an aha moment!" because "they started to see that assessment is not just something we do because we feel like it."

Shari also shared some stories about how faculty seemed to be engaged in assessment when there is a disciplinary connection. For example, Shari discussed how one academic department transformed its entire assessment plan in response to the department's interactions with its advisory board. The "advisory board basically recommended that the department follow industry standards...more closely." Shari said that the department took the recommendations seriously, and they revised their learning outcomes to meet the suggestions of the advisory board. While Shari described this scenario, she characterized the faculty as "involved" with revising their learning outcomes and their entire assessment plan.

Summary of faculty contributions to academic assessment. To summarize, research question three resulted in the following themes: 1) faculty participate in all

levels of assessment, and 2) faculty are engaged in academic assessment tasks when a discipline-based connection is present.

Best Practices for Collaborating with Faculty

The fourth research question sought to describe best practices for effectively collaborating with faculty on academic assessment. After analysis of the data collected to address this research question, three themes emerged: 1) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty emphasizes how the assessment data benefits faculty; 2) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty is dependent upon the extent to which the faculty member(s) and the assessment professional can propose a solution to the assessment problem, and 3) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty focuses on the creation of disciplinary connections to the assessment project. Participants described both on-the-job practical strategies, and aspirant strategies for collaborating with faculty. All of the interviewees described instances when they worked side-by-side with faculty to resolve assessment-related problems or issues.

Emphasize how the assessment data benefits faculty. The first theme that emerged is that assessment professionals should emphasize how the assessment data benefits faculty. A majority of the participants offered narratives about how they consciously emphasized the benefits of assessment data. For example, Norm talked about the "difficult" times when he worked with faculty, particularly when he was working with faculty colleagues in preparation for his institution's regional accrediting follow-up visit. Norm and his faculty colleagues worked for many months together writing and preparing documentation for his institution's SACSCOC visit. Norm said that "he couldn't have done the visit without faculty because they were the ones

surprisingly who talked about assessment and stood up for students." The results of Norm's on-site SACSCOC visit led Norm to conclude that faculty were "proud about their own conclusions, and they wanted to show the accreditor how they improved the curriculum."

Rose pointed out how assessment data benefits faculty by sharing a story about an academic department who "met 100% of their learning goals every year since I've been here." Rose talked about how she consciously worked with these faculty to show them how their assessment data revealed that "meeting every learning goal every year isn't evidence of student learning necessarily." Analysis of assessment data, Rose said, "could help the faculty set new learning goals for students." Rose said that she emphasized "over and over how changing their assessment plan could help them… more realistically reflect student learning rather than …reporting results that are probably too good to be true."

Bob, too, elaborated on how assessment data benefits faculty. Bob shared many examples of how he deliberately created reports for faculty that showed how assessment data contributed to a department's discipline-based requirements. Specifically, Bob said that he would try to "map his institution's learning outcomes to the discipline." Or, he'd try to "put together…information that would help the department with their self study…Bureau of Labor statistics, for example."

Similar to Bob's strategies, Rose also enumerated how she emphasizes that assessment data benefits faculty. Rose shared some anecdotes about how she analyzes a department's assessment report "with improvement at top of mind." For example, Rose said that she tries to "be helpful when I'm evaluating their report…I try to write

comments that show how their information might be interpreted by an outside reviewer and how...[they might] use this feedback in order to improve for next year's report."

Tom and Jerry both offered to be helpful to faculty in their formal and informal interactions with faculty. Tom said that he will "assist whenever a department asked me," and [I] "am always emphasizing that assessment data should tell your student learning story." Tom repeated his helpfulness strategies throughout the interview, especially his willingness to consult with a department, and to emphasize that assessment data add value to the department's learning goals. Jerry, too, also described interactions where he consciously tried to work with faculty members to "see beyond the numbers." Jerry encouraged faculty to "make connections between numbers and IE [institutional effectiveness] strategies." To summarize, all of the participants offered stories that described how they intentionally communicated the value and benefit of assessment data to their faculty colleagues.

Dependence on the extent to which faculty assessment professional can propose solutions. The second theme that emerged is that a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty is dependent upon the extent to which the faculty member and the assessment professional can propose a solution to the assessment problem. Jerry spoke about problem solving as that of a "consultant who provides technical expertise to the faculty," and Jerry said he's occasionally asked to participate in faculty meetings so that he can offer his opinions or recommendations on proposed changes to student learning outcomes and/or changes to assessment methods. Shari shared many examples of on-the-job projects that involved problem solving techniques. For example, Shari described a time when a faculty member inquired about whether she could use course-

level assessment data in a grant application to demonstrate that the degree program met its learning outcomes. Working with the faculty member, Shari presented the course-level data in a manner that met the grant application's requirements. Rose explained how she often worked closely with faculty members at her institution to complete assessment report deadlines. Rose reported that these meetings were opportunities for her to emphasize that "my office is a resource to faculty and that we want to make this as easy as possible for them." Rose said that faculty often seemed to be "relieved" that these visits were more about "guiding the faculty and not policing them." Tom further supported the importance of collaborative problem solving by referring to an email exchange between he and a faculty member where the faculty member asked for a "position statement from someone in the assessment office" about using class time for mandatory course assessment. Tom carefully crafted a position statement that helped the faculty member resolve a dispute within his academic department. In summary, all of the assessment professionals offered many narratives to support how their expertise and/or resources solved an assessment-related problem.

Focus on the creation of disciplinary connections to the assessment project. The final theme that emerged from data analysis is that a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty focuses on the creation of disciplinary connections to the assessment project. This theme is closely related to findings from research question three, *faculty are engaged in academic assessment tasks when a discipline-based connection is present*. This theme, however, is distinct from research question three because the participants specifically reiterated the importance of *creating* connections to

academic disciplines. Tom, as a tenured faculty member, shared examples of why it is important to link assessment findings to the discipline:

> …you've got to find a way to draw them in, to hook them in, and you're lucky if they have required discipline-based standards like AACSB [Association to Advance Colleges and Schools of Business] because they've got to do it anyway.

Instead of using the regional accrediting body as a "threat" when communicating with faculty members on assessment project, Bob tries to find ways to connect student learning outcomes directly to the discipline's expectations. For example, prior to meeting with a faculty member, Bob will "google learning outcomes" [for that discipline], so that he arrives to a faculty meeting well-prepared and well-informed.

Jerry also offered an example of how he advocated for a degree program by creating connections to the discipline. Jerry described the situation of a vocational program that had a looming inspection date, and he asked to be part of the inspection, in case questions were asked about the program's learning outcomes. Jerry described how the program had past troubles with previous inspections, and he intentionally wanted to be present for the inspection, so he could speak on behalf of the program's strong commitment to measuring student learning.

Rose described how she worked with faculty to make connections between general education course curricula and developmental course curricula. Although these courses were not tied to a discipline-required assessment, Rose described how she communicated with faculty to show how general education courses were "rooted" in student learning gains from developmental courses. Rose said that she and a colleague in

her institution's research office worked to "create a matrix" that linked student achievement to earlier performance in developmental courses.

Similar to Rose and Jerry, Norm also advocated for creating discipline-based connections to assessment data. Norm described how he thought that "it's smart to find ways to be helpful to faculty," and he encouraged assessment professionals to "meet the assessment needs of the discipline by being proactive, knowledgeable… about what the discipline demands." Norm recommended that assessment professionals can help themselves by "learning about what the discipline expects."

Shari also described the value of creating discipline-based connections. Shari talked about the nursing faculty at her institution, and how she worked with them to modify assessment methods that were required of the accreditor. Shari said that she "mostly just advised the nursing faculty" in large part "because they don't have any wiggle room" in terms of modifying their assessment plan.

Summary of best practices for collaborating with faculty. To summarize, research question four resulted in the following themes: 1) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty emphasizes how the assessment data benefits faculty; 2) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty is dependent upon the extent to which the faculty member(s) and the assessment professional can propose a solution to the assessment problem, and 3) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty focuses on the creation of disciplinary connections to the assessment project

Summary

Chapter IV presented the findings from the analysis of data with this research study on assessment professionals' efforts to collaboratively work with faculty members.

This chapter included the voices and perspectives offered by six assessment professionals serving in West Texas and Eastern New Mexico institutions of higher education.

Research question one sought to describe the ways in which higher education assessment professionals collaborated with faculty on academic assessment tasks. The analysis of data resulted in the following distinct themes: 1) tension is present among assessment professionals and faculty, 2) power imbalances between faculty and assessment professionals affects compliance, and 3) communicating reciprocity to faculty is a helpful compliance strategy.

Research question two sought to explain how assessment professionals described faculty commitment to academic assessment in relationship to their other professional obligations and roles. The data analysis resulted in the following distinct themes: 1) academic assessment is a new job-related expectation for faculty; 2) faculty are more responsive when their direct supervisor is aware of the assessment task, and 3) it is important to communicate flexibility and supportiveness to build greater commitment to academic assessment.

Research question three sought to understand how assessment professionals described faculty contributions to various levels of course, program, and institutional assessment. The analysis resulted in the following distinct themes: 1) faculty participate in all levels of assessment, and 2) faculty are engaged in academic assessment tasks when a discipline-based connection is present.

Research question four sought to describe best practices for effectively collaborating with faculty on academic assessment. Data analysis resulted in the following themes: 1) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty emphasizes

how the assessment data benefits faculty; 2) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty is dependent upon the extent to which the faculty member(s) and the assessment professional can propose a solution to the assessment problem, and 3) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty focuses on the creation of disciplinary connections to the assessment project.

The analysis presented six recommendations from research participants regarding working collaboratively with faculty on academic assessment tasks: 1) communicating reciprocity to faculty can be a helpful strategy for assessment professionals to gain compliance with assessment tasks; 2) it is important for assessment professionals to communicate flexibility and supportiveness to build greater commitment to academic assessment; 3) faculty are engaged in assessment when a discipline-based connection is present; 4) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty emphasizes how the assessment data benefits faculty; 5) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty is dependent upon the extent to which the faculty member(s) and the assessment professional can propose a solution to the assessment problem, and 6) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty focuses on the creation of disciplinary connections to the assessment project. Chapter V will present a discussion of the findings, including implications of the results of the study for higher education practice, recommendations for higher education practice, as well as recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER V

DISCUSSION

Chapter V presents an overview and discussion of the study's findings, including the implications of the results of the study for higher education assessment professionals and administrators, recommendations for higher education assessment practice and policies, as well as recommendations for future research.

Overview of the Study

The purpose of this study was to explore how assessment professionals described their efforts to work collaboratively with faculty members in order to gain compliance on academic assessment tasks. Exploring assessment professionals' approaches to working with faculty was framed within several underlying concepts that composed the conceptual framework for this study. The conceptual framework for this study was based on research which confirms that the role of faculty in higher education assessment is complicated by many factors, including resistance to assessment, uncertain role expectations, and lack of training. The conceptual framework was also based upon research that documents how academic assessment has been established as a new practice within higher education institutions and that assessment practice within higher education institutions is highly idiosyncratic.

Understanding how assessment professionals collaborate directly with faculty members is unstudied, yet it is an important phenomenon to explore, due to the importance of higher education accountability and assessment. The review of the literature conducted for this study found no research on the collaborative strategies used by assessment professionals to gain faculty compliance on academic assessment tasks.

This qualitative collective case study sought to contribute to the knowledge based on the collaborative strategies that are used by assessment professionals in order to gain faculty compliance on assessment tasks. The collective case study design allowed the researcher to gather data from the perspective of multiple interrelated cases (Creswell, 2014).

This study was guided by four (4) research questions:

1. How do higher education assessment professionals describe their experiences collaborating with faculty on academic assessment?
2. How do assessment professionals describe faculty commitment to academic assessment in relationship to their other traditional professional obligations (teaching, research, and service)?
3. How do assessment professionals describe faculty roles and contributions to program, course, and institutional academic assessment processes?
4. What are best practices for effectively collaborating with faculty on academic assessment?

Discussion of the Findings

Experiences Collaborating with Faculty on Academic Assessment

Research question one sought to describe the ways in which higher education assessment professionals collaborate with faculty on academic assessment tasks. The study participants passionately described their experiences collaborating with faculty on academic assessment. When participants described how they collaborated with faculty, they generally described interactions that were frustrating. This frustration often led them to collaborate strategically with faculty members in order to complete the task at

hand. The analysis of the data produced three distinct themes: 1) power imbalances between faculty and assessment professionals affects compliance, 2) tension is present among assessment professionals and faculty, and 3) communicating reciprocity to faculty is a helpful compliance strategy.

As a way to gain compliance on assessment tasks, the study participants recommended that assessment professionals should consciously communicate reciprocity to faculty members. The participants shared how at times they needed to provide something to faculty in return for their compliance on an assessment task. This exchange-oriented approach seemed to produce better cooperation and collaboration among assessment professionals and faculty. Although an exchange-oriented approach might offer a feasible short-term solution for both assessment professionals and faculty members, it is not a practical long-term solution that will yield high-quality assessment documentation. The use of a successful exchange-oriented solution for faculty members has been documented by Kim (2007), though not in the context of academic assessment. To correct the perception that academic assessment practices are de-valued among faculty members, Thomas and Brown (2011) argued for a new culture of learning in higher education institutions – one that values student learning and the measurement of student learning. Zemsky (2013) detailed how American higher education needs significant reform to value student learning as a product of the higher education enterprise, rather than an afterthought of the enterprise. The analysis of study findings found that higher education reform is necessary in order to change existing faculty attitudes and mores about the value of assessing student learning (Champagne, 2011; Linkon, 2005: Martinez-Aleman, 2012; Powell, 2011). Because assessment professionals

felt that they had to offer something to faculty in exchange for their cooperation on assessment tasks, this emergent theme underscores the need for higher education reform.

Throughout the review of literature for this study, it was found that greater calls for accountability and assessment in higher education have resulted in increased pressure for faculty to document student learning gains (Burke, 2005; Carnevale & Strohl, 2010; Hall, 2012). In addition, it was found that different types of higher education accountability likely contributes to faculty resistance to academic assessment, including upward, downward, inward, and outward (Corbett, 1966; Vidovich & Slee, 2000). The effects of the accountability movement in American higher education has been noted by several authors, and includes a discussion on growing expectations for meeting national and state accountability demands (e.g., Alexander, 2000; Huisman & Curie, 2004; King, 2000).

Findings of this study confirmed the conceptual framework for this study, because the research participants confirmed that the role of faculty in higher education assessment is complicated. Participants described how power imbalances negatively influences the interactions that occur between assessment professionals and faculty members. The study participants described numerous narratives that corroborate the extent to which faculty resist academic assessment activities. According to the participants, faculty members created situations that almost forced a defensive communication response from the assessment professionals. These findings in the current study support the research of Bassis (2015), who has noted that there is a growing discontent of faculty members who begrudgingly participate in assessment. In addition, the findings support the work of Smith (2008) who has also confirmed that faculty members are engaged in a quiet crisis

concerning how they neglect and/or unwillingly participate in academic assessment responsibilities.

Overall, the discussion presented within this chapter highlights the real-world challenges that assessment professionals encounter when collaborating with faculty. While the researcher acknowledges that an exchange-oriented collaborative style may result in short-term success on an assessment project, the researcher recommends that the following collaborative styles will provide more successful long-term success: 1) reduce the tension that exists between faculty and assessment professionals by asserting the methodological expertise that assessment professionals offer, and 2) work jointly, over time, with faculty on assessment projects to mediate the perceived power issues between faculty and assessment professionals. The researcher perceives that working with faculty on long-term assessment projects will bring credibility to the assessment professionals' contributions, so that ultimately less tension will be present within the assessment professional/faculty relationship.

Descriptions of Faculty Commitment to Academic Assessment

Research question two sought to explain how assessment professionals described faculty commitment to academic assessment in relationship to their other professional obligations and roles. Participants described stories that illustrated how faculty members did not prioritize academic assessment tasks as compared to their other job-related expectations. Similar to the findings described from research question one, all of the participants described frustrating experiences with faculty members. However, these descriptions were also tempered by empathy. In most cases, the assessment professionals offered justifications and/or reasons for why faculty were warranted in their frustration.

After analysis of the data, three themes emerged from the interview data: 1) academic assessment is a new job-related expectation for faculty; 2) faculty may be more responsive to completion of academic assessment tasks when their direct supervisor is aware of the assessment task, and 3) assessment professionals should communicate flexibility and supportiveness to their faculty colleagues to build greater commitment to academic assessment.

As a method of gaining faculty compliance on academic assessment tasks, most of the research participants recommended that assessment professionals should communicate flexibility and supportiveness to their faculty colleagues to build greater commitment to academic assessment. Participants discussed how they routinely tried to be supportive of faculty efforts to assess student learning, yet they also acknowledged that being too flexible often backfired on them. Overall, the participants recommended that communication with faculty members should be flexible when possible, but communication may need to be more prescriptive when the situation warrants it. This situational perspective reflects the pressure that assessment professionals face to produce assessment evidence that is compliant with regional accreditation standards and/or discipline-based accreditation standards. Furthermore, this tightrope-like approach also signals that the mere discussion of academic assessment may generate a defensive faculty response. Azziz (2014) discussed how internal communication about academic assessment with faculty members is "challenging and too often [a] neglected task in complex organizations, including colleges and universities where assessment is happening at numerous levels and various places – course, program, general education, and institution" (p. 33).

Throughout the review of literature for this study, it was found that faculty members directly affect student learning, so therefore assessment professionals are reliant upon interactions with faculty members to accomplish academic assessment tasks. Diamond (2011) and Fink (2003) draw a direct connection between the important role that faculty play in influencing and improving student learning. Diamond's (2011) research specifically links faculty instruction to improvements in academic assessment results. Bresciani's (2006) research also makes explicit the critical role of faculty instruction to collecting and analyzing assessment data. Banta and Blaich (2010) discussed the importance of faculty participation in assessment. Their grassroots approach suggests that assessment is successful when institutions are actively engaged in planning, implementing, sustaining, and improving their assessment processes. Banta and Blaich (2010) argued that effective assessment must put student learning first, and that instructional strategies must reflect this ethos.

In addition, the review of literature confirmed the findings from research question two regarding how academic assessment is a new job-related expectation for faculty. Faculty roles in higher education assessment are not particularly well-defined (Trullen & Rodriguez, 2013). Trullen and Rodriguez (2013) found that faculty who perceive assessments are carried out for quality improvement reasons are more likely to rate academic assessment as legitimate and were more likely to be more identified and/or aligned with the academic program that was being assessed. There are some faculty, though, that view academic assessment as too instrumental or even too powerful when determining the future of an academic program (Trullen & Rodriguez, 2013).

However, despite a dearth in the literature regarding the extent to which assessment in included within faculty job descriptions, Kuh et al. (2015) discussed the need to re-examine reward structures for faculty assessment. Hutchings (2010) documented how faculty are often overburdened and pressed to fulfill additional work for external accountability, and how "rewards systems rarely signal the value of assessment activities, and, therefore, discourage faculty from taking ownership and engaging fully" (p. 3).

The review of literature did not confirm the study's findings for the following theme: faculty may be more responsive to completion of academic assessment tasks when their direct supervisor is aware of the assessment task. The researcher could not locate any literature that researches specifically how assessment professionals work with faculty members in this particular manner. However, in 2015, a nationwide Faculty Survey of Assessment Culture demonstrated that 33.8% of all faculty respondents could name "the office at my institution that leads student assessment efforts for accreditation purposes," suggesting that faculty are aware that an institutional organizational hierarchy exists to document and oversee assessment activities (Fuller & Beck, 2015, p. 7). Further research is needed to explore whether this strategy is effective or ineffective.

According to the conceptual framework used to guide this study, assessment professionals confirmed that the role of faculty in higher education assessment is complicated. However, despite the myriad complications, the research participants described how compliance could be achieved through open communication strategies that emphasized supportiveness and flexibility. Further, research participants offered narratives that corroborated how they used this strategy to be successful in their jobs.

According to the participants, they selected their strategies based upon individual, departmental, or even institutional circumstances. Participants also shared stories about when an open and/or flexible style failed.

Overall, the discussion section presented within this chapter describes the challenges that assessment professionals encounter when collaborating with faculty. The researcher acknowledges that the absence of academic assessment responsibilities within faculty job descriptions is harmful to the present and future of institutional assessment initiatives. Higher education faculty have the right to be held accountable for assessment-related responsibilities; however, this is impossible if the responsibility is not explicitly described within the job description. This finding has serious consequences for the assessment discipline. If this practice continues, assessment activities will continue to be a faculty responsibility that is not taken seriously. If faculty fail to meaningfully document their assessment efforts, faculty may inadvertently put their institutions at risk of losing their accreditation status. The researcher strongly advocates for including assessment responsibilities explicitly within faculty job descriptions. Explicitly listing assessment within the faculty job description would give the assessment professional greater authority to hold faculty accountable for conducting and documenting academic assessment activities.

Faculty Contributions to Academic Assessment

The third research question sought to understand how assessment professionals described faculty contributions to various levels of course, program, and institutional assessment. Participants explained many stories that described faculty roles and contributions to course, program, and institutional assessment processes. There were two

distinct themes that emerged: (1) faculty participate in all levels of assessment, and (2) faculty are engaged in academic assessment tasks when a discipline-based connection is present.

As a method of gaining faculty compliance on academic assessment tasks, most of the research participants recommended that faculty are more engaged in academic assessment tasks when a discipline-based connection is present. Participants shared many stories about how they worked side-by-side with faculty members on discipline-specific assessment tasks. Most of these stories were positive in nature, because the faculty member worked collaboratively with the assessment professional in order to complete the project. This commitment to faculty disciplinary identity is confirmed by Burton Clark (1997), who wrote about how disciplinary identities are the “primary matrix of induced and enforced difference among American academics” (p. 22). Disciplinary identities help to shape perspectives, values, and even preferred assessment methods. Bennett and Brady (2012) documented how disciplines prefer certain assessment methods tied to their disciplinary identity, and Banta, Griffin, Flateby, & Kahn (2009) even asserted that “faculty in preprofessional and accredited programs are further along in their thinking about and use of assessment” (p. 102).

The review of literature confirmed the findings from research question three regarding how faculty participate in academic assessment (e.g., Banta & Blaich, 2010; Bresciani, 2006; Diamond, 2011). Throughout the review of literature for this study, it was found that faculty members participate in all levels of assessment, which was also confirmed within the analysis of data. Faculty participation in academic assessment is well documented in the literature (e.g., Angelo & Cross, 1993; Campbell Wilkins, 2007;

DeNoriega, 2006; Finkelstein, Seal, & Schuster; 1998 Kuh, 2008; Palomba & Banta, 1999).

According to the conceptual framework described previously, assessment professionals confirmed that academic assessment has been established as a new practice within higher education institutions (Eraut, 2006; Ewell, 1994; Ferguson, 2011; Hunt & Tierney, 2006; Lew, Alwis & Schmidt, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1997) and that assessment practice within higher education institutions is highly idiosyncratic. Faculty participated in all levels of academic assessment and faculty are especially engaged in assessment activities when a discipline-based connection in present. Interestingly, assessment professionals described patterns of collaboration that would be found in empowering organizations. Findings of this study support Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo's (1983) foundational work on studying patterns of communication in empowering organizations, because the research participants described how they used integrative problem solving to resolve discipline-based assessment problems. Research participants offered narratives that corroborated how they worked side-by-side with faculty members on discipline-specific projects. Therefore, assessment professionals need to seek out opportunities to collaborate with faculty in a side-by-side consultative manner. For example, the researcher recommends that assessment professionals identify degree programs that have upcoming discipline-specific on-site reviews or self-studies to offer their content knowledge and methodological expertise. Assessment professionals should implement this type of collaborative, proactive, responsible strategy with all degree programs that have required discipline-specific accreditation reviews.

Findings of this study confirmed Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo's (1983) tenets of empowering organizational cultures because the research participants confirmed high participation in academic assessment. According to Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983), one of the tenets associated with empowering organizational cultures is encouraging high performance and accountability. The analysis of data revealed that faculty participate in all levels of academic assessment, including course-level, program-level, and institutional assessment.

Best Practices for Collaborating with Faculty

The fourth research question sought to describe best practices for effectively collaborating with faculty on academic assessment. Participants described both on-the-job practical strategies, and aspirant strategies for collaborating with faculty. All of the interviewees described instances when they worked side-by-side with faculty to resolve assessment-related problems or issues. The following distinct themes emerged from the data: 1) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty emphasizes how the assessment data benefits faculty; 2) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty is dependent upon the extent to which the faculty member(s) and the assessment professional can propose a solution to the assessment problem, and 3) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty focuses on the creation of disciplinary connections to the assessment project.

In terms of recommendations for best practices strategies, the study's participants recommended all of the aforementioned collaborative efforts when working with faculty. The participants also reiterated how these strategies resulted in feelings of goodwill toward the faculty. They shared many stories about how they worked side-by-side with

faculty members to propose solutions to assessment problems. The participants also spoke proudly about helping faculty create discipline-based connections to their assessment data. Kuh et al. (2015) offered several new strategies for engaging faculty in best practices assessment:

> …locate assessment in the commitments that faculty hold; respect faculty curricular authority and ownership; cultivate the faculty voice; facilitate both formal developmental opportunities and informal spaces for faculty to engage with, learn about, and enact assessment; create mechanisms to share internal best practices and success stories; provide the structural support to encourage faculty to take assessment seriously; build on disciplinary expertise and perspectives; allow for flexibility within a shared framework, and embed assessment in the work faculty are already doing" (pp. 104-107).

Therefore, the researcher advocates for using collaboration as an overall compliance strategy when working with faculty. Analysis of the participants' experiences suggests that collaboration may be the ideal strategy for securing institutional compliance on assessment requirements. If assessment professionals can use these collaborative strategies to gain the compliance of individual faculty members, then making a case for institutional compliance becomes a less onerous task.

The review of literature confirmed the findings from research question four regarding best practices for measuring student learning. Throughout the review of literature for this study, it was found that assessment of student learning is multi-faceted and unique to the institution's mission, resources, and methods (e.g., Cross, 2008; Yorke, 2003). A best practices perspective suggests that direct, observable student behavior and

performance on classroom-based assessment, coupled with indirect assessment techniques related to student self-perception, provide evidence of student learning (Cross & Steadman, 1996). The research participants mostly described examples of direct student assessments, although three participants did explicitly discuss indirect examples of student assessments (i.e., surveys about student perceptions of a course or program).

Findings of this study expanded upon the conceptual framework offered within this study. Assessment professionals offered specific guidance for collaborating with faculty, despite the challenges and complications of the faculty role in higher education assessment. The analysis of data revealed that research participants collaborated with faculty in a manner that inspired trust, and in a way that challenged the faculty to think differently about academic assessment practices. The analysis of data also revealed that the research participants reflected on their own successes and failures, and they were able to use best practices approaches in their daily work.

The discussion of findings gives voice to the role of the assessment professional in higher education. Assessment professionals are an unstudied employee group within higher education, and this study aimed to contribute to the literature on this particular employee group. This study points to the value of interprofessional collaboration among employee groups within higher education.

Overall, the discussion of findings leads the researcher to offer several observations for collaborating with faculty. The researcher acknowledges that assessment professionals must work collaboratively with faculty, but assessment professionals must vigorously assert that assessment leads both to improvement *and* to compliance. This re-framing of assessment must occur and assessment professionals

must lead this dialogue and seize the leadership challenge. Framing assessment around improvement, the researcher advances, also requires the language of assessment to change. Assessment professionals must assert their leadership, but within the informed understanding that faculty roles in academic assessment are complicated.

Implications for Higher Education Practice

This study gives voice to the role of assessment professionals in higher education. Assessment professionals are an unstudied employee group within higher education, and this study aimed to contribute to the literature on this particular employee group. This study points to the value of interprofessional collaboration among employee groups within higher education. The findings of this study suggest several implications for assessment professionals and administrators at higher education institutions.

The first implication for higher education practice is that the current accountability climate is not overwhelmingly empowering either to assessment professionals or faculty members. Whereas empowering organizational cultures distribute power and opportunity widely (Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo, 1983), the study participants offered many stories of power inequality between assessment professionals and faculty members. Prior research (e.g., Deffenbacher, 2011; Ferren, 1993; Hutchings, 2010) as well as this study's participants confirmed that accountability requirements are growing both in scope and stringency, which creates an unequal power structure among assessment professionals and faculty, and may lead to discontent and distrust among these employee groups. This organizational culture can have serious negative consequences for institutions that fail to meet assessment accreditation requirements, most notably loss of federal financial aid to students. Research literature

does offer some methods to bolster faculty commitment to academic assessment. For example, Shapiro (2014) suggests communicating with faculty in sensitive ways. He shared that "faculty can be sufficiently put off by the [assessment] lingo not to bother attending to the message" (para. 6). Another recommendation about the use of assessment vernacular is offered by Ewell (2002), who recommends that terms such as *value added* that come from institutional assessment leaders are not likely to make friends of faculty members. A third recommendation derives from Bennion (2002), who encourages institutions to work toward shared understandings of the assessment language that *is* used. Bennion (2002) asserts that institutions should develop assessment glossaries for all assessment stakeholders, so that there is shared understanding among faculty and administrators.

A second implication for higher education practice is that a failure for assessment professionals to adopt an open, flexible, and supportive communication style with faculty may result in a disempowering organizational culture. Some of the participants recommended that this style should be used carefully and with discretion. Empowering organizational cultures, according to Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1983), keep communication open and transparent. Another method for creating an empowering assessment is to engage in informal communication with faculty as a gateway method to facilitate conversations about student learning (Jankowski, Hutchings, Ewell, Kinzie, & Kuh 2013). Furthermore, too much rigidity may undercut faculty engagement in assessment and limit the potential of assessment efforts (Kuh et al., 2015).

A third implication for higher education practice is that when assessment professionals consciously work *together* with faculty to solve assessment problems, this

helps to create faculty buy-in and an empowering organizational culture. All of the participants offered copious examples of side-by-side work with faculty members on all kinds of assessment projects. This close work with faculty helped to inspire trust of the assessment professional's content expertise, while at the same time the faculty member was challenged to think about assessment not as a tool for compliance, but as a tool for improvement. Empowering organizational cultures, according to Pacanowsky and O'Donnell-Trujillo (1987), use integrative problem solving while also encouraging high performance and accountability. Kuh et al. (2015) supports a problem-solving approach by advocating for *cultivating the faculty voice* as a method of creating faculty buy-in. *Cultivating the faculty voice* encourages administrators to carefully consider past assessment-related experiences and perceptions that faculty hold.

> Rather than dismissing faculty questions and complaints as mere intransigence, respect the validity of their perspectives. Senior faculty may have been through previous iterations of assessment or related efforts, and that experience may inform how they view current ones. Or faculty concerns about reporting formats or other requirements may point to areas in need of improvement. As such, it is important not to let the long-standing narrative of faculty resistance diminish the respect that their very real concerns are afforded. (p. 105)

By using the strategy described by Kuh et al. (2015) above, assessment professionals must recognize that faculty approach academic assessment from collections of past experiences, and it is unfair to presume that all faculty are resistant or unwilling to learn new methods of assessing student learning.

A fourth implication for higher education practice is that assessment professionals may consider using interprofessional collaboration as a legitimate compliance strategy. The findings of this study suggest that interprofessional collaboration achieves results, which ultimately benefits higher education courses, degree programs, and institutions. The study of interprofessional collaboration has been explored in teams of medical professionals, but it has not been applied to the study of higher education faculty and higher education assessment professionals (D'Amour, Ferrada-Videla, San Martin Rodriguez, & Beaulieu, 2005).

Recommendations for Higher Education Practice

The results of this study have produced several recommendations that can be implemented in order to strengthen the practice of higher education assessment. The first recommendation for higher education practice is that institutional leaders must explicitly state that academic assessment is a required part of the faculty contract. Clarifying these expectations for faculty is fair, especially because assessment practices generally require significant effort, especially when performed well. Although academic assessment has been established as a new cultural practice in institutions of higher education, the extent to which faculty contracts and job descriptions have been modified in response to this cultural practice is unstudied (Eraut, 2006; Ewell, 1994; Ferguson, 2011; Hunt & Tierney, 2006; Lew, Alwis & Schmidt, 2010; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1997). Many of the research participants is this study offered empathic responses to the faculty with whom they worked, because academic assessment places a burden on faculty members in which they receive very little benefit. Assessment expectations should be clearly

articulated for faculty members, in a similar way that teaching, service, and research expectations are communicated.

The second recommendation for higher education practice is that assessment professionals must create meaningful professional development opportunities for faculty. As the review of literature noted, faculty members enter their professorial roles with very little, if any, training on pedagogy or academic assessment techniques (Campbell Wilkins, 2007; Finkelstein et al., 1998; Reybold, 2003; Tierney, 1998; Reybold). Huber and Hutchings (2005) and Kuh et al. (2015) recommend formal developmental opportunities for faculty, as well as the creation of informal spaces for faculty to engage with, learn about, and enact assessment. Training opportunities must be designed to include all types of faculty members – part-time faculty, nontenure-track full-time faculty, practice-oriented faculty, research faculty, tenure-track faculty, and tenured faculty. This inclusive approach to training should also take into account faculty members who teach at a distance; therefore, assessment professionals should consider offering online training modules that can be accessed remotely. Furthermore, offering professional developmental opportunities might be helpful in slowly transforming the assessment culture away from compliance and toward improvement.

The third recommendation for higher education practice is that institutions must develop their own assessment policies that privilege continuous improvement of student learning. The development of institutional assessment policies should simultaneously offer reward systems for faculty who report their assessment activities and penalize faculty who fail to report their assessment activities. Institutions need to move away from using the term *compliance* in their institutional assessment policies, which

connotatively assumes that dire consequences will ensue for a faculty or department found not to be in compliance. Maki (2015), in a speech to the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, discussed how institutional assessment policies must reflect a commitment that is internally driven to result in student success and that "there is no time in American higher education than now where we must double our efforts in student learning assessment" (Maki, 2015). Maki (2015) also said that institutions must develop assessment policies that move from a "delayed response" and "survivor" modes of assessment to "real-time assessment."

The fourth recommendation for higher education practice is to encourage assessment professionals to have more direct involvement with the academic decisions of their respective institutions. Direct involvement can take many forms, such as serving as a voting member of an academic decision-making group, like a core curriculum committee, a general education committee, a state education board, or a departmental assessment subcommittee. These kinds of academic decision-making groups help inform decisions, reinforce the value of assessment activities, and the improvements that subsequently result. Lock and Kraska (2015) explored how administrators were involved in an advisory assessment committee, and they found that decision-making was more informed when a wide range of administrators consistently participated in meetings.

The fifth recommendation for higher education practice is to develop formal partnerships between assessment professionals and faculty. For example, creating a faculty fellowship program between an institutional assessment office and a faculty governing body is one pragmatic strategy for strengthening relationships between faculty and assessment professionals. A second formal partnership that can be created to

strengthen relationships between faculty and assessment professionals is for institutional assessment offices to offer competitive assessment stipends to faculty. A third example of a formal partnership between assessment professionals and faculty is to provide workload credit or reassignment time for faculty who are responsible for departmental, college, or institutional assessment efforts. Establishing these types of partnerships is not well documented in the scholarly literature. However, James Madison University offers a model for engaging faculty and assessment professionals in assessment partnerships that could be referenced for institutions that wish to develop these types of programs (Amato, Good, Smith, & Fulcher, 2014). Specifically, James Madison University has an established assessment fellows program that pairs faculty with assessment staff to prepare analyses of assessment data for their academic department (Amato et al., 2014).

Recommendations for Future Research

Study findings from this qualitative study point to several areas of future research: 1) the need to closely study the emergence of assessment professionals as a new area of content expertise within American higher education; 2) the need for reform of the American higher education system to intrinsically value academic assessment not as a tool for accountability purposes, but as a tool for improvement; 3) the need to formalize academic assessment as a bona fide faculty responsibility, and 4) the need to study assessment professionals who work in institutions that do not meet compliance criteria.

First, a future qualitative researcher might consider a collective case study approach to describe the unique pressures and skill sets of assessment professionals. Assessment professionals are an unstudied employee group in higher education. The emergence of assessment professionals in higher education might be compared to the

emergence of student affairs professionals in the late 70s and early 80s. This employee group carries a significant burden to present an institutional or departmental case for compliance with regional or discipline-specific accrediting bodies. Moreover, this employee group must work with faculty in a sensitive manner that preserves faculty autonomy, yet also meets the institution's need to demonstrate robust assessment evidence. Assessment professionals must also have methodological expertise when working alongside faculty. This study indicates that future research is necessary to understand how assessment professionals contribute to institutional compliance.

Second, findings from this study point to the need for deep reform of the American higher education system to intrinsically value academic assessment not as a tool for accountability purposes, but as a tool for improvement. This study triangulates previous research about the need to move away from connecting academic assessment to compliance, and instead move towards a focus on improvement. However, the ways in which institutions accomplish this reform are not particularly well-documented. A future qualitative researcher might examine specific strategies that an institution has implemented longitudinally in order to intentionally connect assessment practice to improvement. There are few practical and pragmatic tools for institutions who wish to consciously change and/or create an assessment culture. Many institutions may already have assessment practices in place, but the assessment practices themselves may be more about conducting the assessment exercises rather than using the results for improvement purposes.

Third, findings from this study necessitate a thorough investigation into faculty job descriptions and faculty roles. Research participants indicated that very few faculty

members list academic assessment as a bona fide responsibility on their contracts or job descriptions. A future quantitative analysis might examine how many faculty job descriptions include academic assessment. An analysis of these results may indicate that assessment expectations for faculty need to be more clearly articulated. Further analysis on this topic could lead to clearer expectations for faculty, and perhaps even additional stipends for those faculty who have significant assessment responsibilities.

Last, a future qualitative study might involve an institutional case study that failed to meet assessment compliance standards. While this study focused on the individual efforts of assessment professionals to gain faculty compliance on assessment, findings of this study point to the need to study assessment professionals who work within institutions that are unsuccessful in their compliance efforts. Higher education institutions are complex organizations with their own unique histories and politics. A deeper investigation into institutions that do not meet compliance standards could result in a better understanding of the challenges and pressures that assessment professionals experience in these high-stress situations.

Conclusion

The purpose of this study was to explore how assessment professionals described their efforts to work collaboratively with faculty to gain their compliance on academic assessment tasks. This qualitative research study was conducted through the lens of naturalistic inquiry. A collective case study research design was used to study collaborative behaviors within the context of assessment professionals' work. The collective case study design allowed the researcher to gather data from the perspective of

multiple interrelated cases. Data was collected through semi-structured interviews. The processes of open coding, axial coding, subcoding, and NVivo coding were also used.

The findings of this study indicated that assessment professionals employ specific strategies to gain faculty compliance on academic assessment tasks. First, participants noted that communicating reciprocity was a helpful compliance strategy. In other words, offering something in return to the faculty member seemed to help the faculty member complete the assessment task. Second, participants suggested that conveying flexibility and supportiveness, where appropriate, was also a useful compliance strategy. The participants described how they consciously made decisions about extending assessment deadlines based upon departmental or institutional circumstances. Third, the participants reiterated the importance of recognizing disciplinary-based connections to the assessment data. This intentional strategy helped the faculty members contextualize the data within their discipline. Finally, the participants offered six recommendations for working collaboratively with faculty on academic assessment tasks: 1) communicating reciprocity to faculty can be a helpful strategy for assessment professionals to gain compliance with assessment tasks; 2) assessment professionals should convey flexibility and supportiveness to their faculty colleagues in order to help build greater commitment to academic assessment; 3) faculty are engaged in assessment when a discipline-based connection is present; 4) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty emphasizes how the assessment data benefits faculty; 5) a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty is dependent upon the extent to which the faculty member(s) and the assessment professional can propose a solution to the assessment problem, and 6)

a best practices approach for collaborating with faculty focuses on the creation of disciplinary connections to the assessment project.

The results of this study lead to several implications for higher education practice, including that the current accountability climate is not overwhelmingly empowering either to assessment professionals or faculty members; collaborative strategies used by assessment professionals need to be intentional in order to gain faculty compliance, assessment professionals must consciously work together with faculty to solve assessment problems, and assessment professionals should consider interprofessional collaboration as a legitimate compliance strategy. These four implications indicate that institutions will continue to be challenged to achieve greater faculty compliance with academic assessment within the current higher education environment.

The discussion of findings gives voice to the role of the assessment professional in higher education. Assessment professionals are an unstudied employee group within higher education, and this study aimed to contribute to the literature on this particular employee group.

The results of this study lead to several recommendations for higher education practice. The first recommendation is the need for assessment professionals to create meaningful professional development opportunities for faculty, so that faculty learn about assessment techniques and strategies at the course, program, and institutional levels. The second recommendation is that institutional leaders must explicitly state that academic assessment is a required part of the faculty contract. Clarifying these expectations for faculty is fair, especially because assessment practices generally require significant effort, especially when performed well. The third recommendation is that institutions must

develop their own assessment policies that privilege continuous improvement of student learning. Institutions need to move *away* from using the term compliance, and instead develop and implement institutional policies that emphasize improvement. The fourth recommendation for higher education practice is to encourage assessment professionals to have more direct involvement with the academic decisions of their respective institutions. Direct involvement can take many forms, such as serving as a voting member of an academic decision-making group, like a core curriculum committee, a general education committee, a state education board, or a departmental assessment subcommittee. The final recommendation for higher education practice is to create formal partnerships between assessment professionals and faculty. Examples of formal partnerships include the development of a faculty fellow program, the awarding of faculty assessment stipends, and the offering of workload credit or reassignment time to faculty who have significant responsibilities in assessment.

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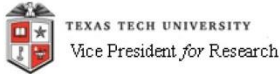
APPENDIX A

Protection of Human Subjects Committee Approval



June 30, 2014

Dr. Stephanie Jones
Ed Psychology & Leadership
Mail Stop: 1071

Regarding: 504615 Exploring How Assessment Professionals Describe Faculty Compliance with Academic Assessment in Higher Education

Dr. Stephanie Jones:

The Texas Tech University Protection of Human Subjects Committee approved your claim for an exemption for the protocol referenced above on July 8, 2014.

Exempt research is not subject to continuing review. However, any modifications that (a) change the research in a substantial way, (b) might change the basis for exemption, or (c) might introduce any additional risk to subjects must be reported to the Human Research Protection Program (HRPP) before they are implemented.

To report such changes, you must send a new claim for exemption or a proposal for expedited or full board review to the HRPP. Extension of exempt status for exempt protocols that have not changed is automatic.

The HRPP staff will send annual reminders that ask you to update the status of your research protocol. Once you have completed your research, you must inform the HRPP office by responding to the annual reminder so that the protocol file can be closed.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Cogan

Rosemary Cogan, Ph.D., ABPP
Protection of Human Subjects Committee

Box 41075 | Lubbock, Texas 79409-1075 | T 806.742.3905 | F 806.742.3947 | www.vpr.ttu.edu
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APPENDIX B

Recruitment Email to Potential Participants

Dear Dr. ______________________________:

Greetings! My name is Jennifer Hughes, and I am currently a doctoral student at Texas Tech University. The purpose of this study is to study how assessment professionals work with faculty to gain their compliance on assessment tasks. You have been identified as a potential participant in this study based upon your role as an {INSERT JOB TITLE} at {INSERT NAME OF INSTITUTION}. Your cooperation and participation in this study is entirely voluntary. I have attached an information sheet that provides more details about the study.

I would like to ask if you would be willing to participate in a 1-2 hour interview with me via telephone or in-person. I am happy to arrange an interview time that is convenient for you and your schedule. You have a choice about whether you wish your interview to be audio recorded, and a consent form will be provided to you before the interview. I will be the only one who knows who participates in this study. You will have the opportunity to name a pseudonym that will identify your responses. You will have an opportunity to review and correct any errors on the interview transcript.

If you have any questions in regard to this research study, you can contact me by telephone at (806) 470-5789 or via e-mail at Jennifer.s.hughes@ttu.edu. You may also contact Dr. Stephanie J. Jones, who is supervising this study, at (806) 834-1380 or via e-mail at stephanie.j.jones@ttu.edu. Texas Tech University has an Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, so if you have questions about your rights as a participant, you can call them at (806) 742-2064.

If you would be willing to participate in this study, please notify me via email by September 1, 2014. I look forward to hearing from you, and I sincerely appreciate your consideration.

Best,

Jennifer S. Hughes

APPENDIX C

Information Sheet for Participants

Title of Study: Exploring how Assessment Professionals Describe Faculty Compliance with Academic Assessment in Higher Education

What is this research project about?
The purpose of this study is to explore how assessment professionals describe their communication strategies with faculty members to persuade them to participate in academic assessment tasks. Assessment professionals' experiences working with faculty is important to understand, especially because they need to provide faculty with resources, strategies, and methods to measure student learning at the course, program, and institutional level. This study will use a case study approach, and the Co-PI will interview assessment professionals in West Texas and Eastern New Mexico.

What would you do if you participate?
Participants will be asked to participate in a 1-2 hour, in-person or telephone interview in which you will be asked a series of questions about your perceptions and experiences as an assessment professional. Further, you will be asked questions about your perceptions and experiences regarding how you collaboratively work with faculty on assessment tasks and projects.

You can select the date and time for the interview, and I will either travel to your institution to conduct the in-person interview or contact you at the telephone number you provide to me. Interview days and times will be set after you have formally expressed an interest in participating in the study. I will use your preferred communication method to schedule the interview day and time.

The interview will follow a semi-structured interview approach and will be audio recorded. You will have an opportunity to provide a pseudonym that I will use during the interview, and you will also have an opportunity to review your interview transcript to ensure you are comfortable with your transcripted responses.

How long will my participation take?
The interview should last no more than one 1-2 hours.

Can I quit if I become uncomfortable?
Yes, you are welcome to quit the interview if you become uncomfortable. The researchers and the Texas Tech University Institutional Review Board have reviewed the questions included for the interview and they believe you can comfortably answer them. Participation is voluntary, and it is entirely your choice to participate in this study. You will not be compensated for participating in this study, and you are free to stop answering questions at any time and discontinue the interview if you feel uncomfortable. You may skip any question(s) you do not feel comfortable answering.

How are you protecting my privacy?
All participants will be given an opportunity to select a pseudonym to be used in the study, and all study data will be secured in a locked storage. Electronic files will be saved on a computer that requires a password. The only individuals privileged to view data will be the researchers.

I have some questions about this study. Who can I ask?

1. If you have any questions about this research study, you can contact Jennifer Hughes at (806) 470-5789 or via email at Jennifer.s.hughes@ttu.edu.
2. You may also contact Dr. Stephanie J. Jones, who is supervising this study, at (806) 834-1380 or via e-mail at stephanie.j.jones@ttu.edu.
3. Texas Tech University also has a Board, the Institutional Review Board, which protects the rights of people who participate in research. You may contact them with questions by calling (806) 742-2064 or via email at hrpp@ttu.edu You may also contact them by mail at Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects, Office of the Vice President for Research, Texas Tech University, Lubbock, Texas 79409.

How will I benefit from participating in this study?
There is no monetary compensation for your participation in this study. However, you will have an opportunity to contribute to the literature on academic assessment practices. The emergence of assessment professionals in higher education is an unstudied phenomenon, and you will be able to participate in the construction of this literature.

How can I participate in the study?
If you would like to participate in this study, please send an e-mail to Jennifer Hughes (Jennifer.s.hughes@ttu.edu) stating your willingness to participate. She can also be reached by telephone at (806) 470-5789.

APPENDIX D

Interview Protocol

Script: Thank you for agreeing to be part of my dissertation study. This interview should take approximately 1-2 hours, and you are welcome to discontinue your participation at any time. As a reminder, you have given consent to audio record your responses at this particular time. If you do not wish to be audio recorded, I will use my field notes and your pseudonym to refer to direct quotes and/or emergent themes. I am now going to use your chosen pseudonym throughout this interview process. You may skip any question(s) you do not feel comfortable answering.

1. What roles does the faculty at your institution have in assessing student learning?
2. When you thought about working in academic assessment, did you know anything about assessment? Was it part of your graduate school training?
3. Can you tell me a time when you needed to work with faculty on an assessment project?
4. What kinds of academic assessment projects do you currently work on with faculty? In your experience, are any of these projects more or less important to the faculty you work with?
5. How do you characterize the commitment to academic assessment shown by the faculty with whom you work on a regular basis?
6. What kinds of academic assessment tasks do you work with faculty on to ensure that students are learning?
7. Based on your work with faculty in academic assessment, where does academic assessment fit into faculty areas of research, teaching, and service?
8. How do faculty make time for academic assessment? Do they share stories with you about how they make time for assessment as part of their overall responsibilities?
9. Are there times when your office provides directives to faculty about assessment? How does the faculty tend to respond to these instructions?
10. How would you describe the faculty's styles or approaches of documenting academic assessment?
11. How do you as an assessment professional motivate faculty to participate in academic assessment initiatives at your institution?
12. To what extent do you assist faculty with selecting assessment methods for courses, degrees, etc.? Where do you think faculty rank assessment among their faculty tasks and responsibilities? Please explain.
13. Do you think that the growing trend toward documenting student learning has changed the culture of your institution? In what ways? How has this changed faculty involvement with academic assessment at your institution overall?
14. Can you tell me a story about when you worked with faculty on academic assessment that did not go well? Can you tell me a story about when you worked with faculty on academic assessment that did go well? What seems to distinguish the experience that went well from the experience that did not go well?

APPENDIX E

Demographic Questionnaire

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this dissertation study entitled *"Exploring how Assessment Professionals Describe Faculty Compliance with Academic Assessment in Higher Education."* Before we begin the interview, please answer the following 10 questions. This questionnaire should take approximately 5-10 minutes.

Please list a one-word pseudonym that will be used to identify your responses:
____

Please list your gender.

_______Male _______ Female _______ Prefer not to disclose

Please check which category that describes your age.

_______ 20 – 30
_______ 31 – 40
_______ 41 – 50
_______ 51 – 60
_______ 61 – 70
_______ 71 – 80
_______ 81 – 90

Can you list how many years you have worked within the field of academic assessment?
____

Can you please describe your ethnicity?

____

Please check whether you are currently a full-time employee or a part-time employee.

_____ Full-time _____ Part-time

Please list your home institution: _______________________________________

Please list your highest earned degree: ___________________________________

Can you please describe your responsibilities for assessing student learning at your institution?