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Distinguishing Assessment from Accountability: Honoring Student Learning and Values in Assessment

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DISTINGUISHING ASSESSMENT FROM ACCOUNTABILITY: HONORING

STUDENT LEARNING AND VALUES IN ASSESSMENT

Erin Elizabeth Pearce Thomas

Accountability is documented as one of the two major forces for engaging in assessment (Ewell, 2002, 2009; Keeling, 2006; Keeling et al., 2008; Love & Estanek, 2004; Terenzini, 1989). Due in part to neoliberalism's influence on education assessment rhetoric and discourse, accountability dominates how assessment is understood and practiced. The dominance of the accountability rhetoric effects how student affairs educators perceive and value assessment. The purpose of this study is to explore why assessment is not a pervasive or consistent practice within student affairs. Through an interpretivist case study examination of Manresa University's division of student affairs, participant observation, document analysis, and interviews were used to define and explore assessment perceptions, attitudes, and practices among division staff members. The original focus of the study was to shed light on the internal commitment to improvement, the smaller force behind assessment, but evolved into examining the data through a larger social construct – neoliberalism – that influences both forces through its influence on society, education, and assessment.

The results and findings of this study provide insight and guidance to student affairs educators, and potentially all educators, for how they can begin to reframe

assessment as a process and discourse that honors student learning, educational values and missions, and standards of exemplary practice. Embracing institutional and professional values, setting intentional definitions and standards of success or excellence, and resisting accountability and neoliberal pressures that devalue education each play a significant role in how student affairs and student affairs educators interpret and engage in assessment of student learning and development. The findings of this study also offer guidance for student affairs educators to convert assessment to a process and discourse that honors student learning and educational values by increasing their responsibility to critique and direct assessment and the forces that influence it.

DISTINGUISHING ASSESSMENT FROM ACCOUNTABILITY: HONORING

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I would like to thank my supportive and amazing family who has encouraged and supported me throughout my academic endeavors. The main reason I maintained "Pearce" as a part of my legal name when I married was for this moment. I want to proudly display the Pearce family name on my dissertation and diploma, to bring honor to my family name but more importantly to recognize them for the unconditional love and support they give so unselfishly. I am a product of a caring, faithful family who keeps me in their prayers as well as challenges me to be a better person, and for these things I am forever grateful. Thank you to my grandparents (Harvey and Gladys, Lorraine and the late Paul), parents (Gary and DeeAnn, Garf and the late Karen), siblings (Elicia and Shawn, Brent and Courtney, Stacy and Steve, Kara, and Kristi), nieces and nephews (Ryan, Katie, Karlie, Tyler, Abbie, Breck, Cullen, and Finnley), and my many wonderful aunts, uncles, and cousins.

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E. E. P. T.

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CHAPTER I

THE PROBLEM AND ITS BACKGROUND

Assessment dialogue and discussions over the past several decades have not addressed the larger societal forces that affect education and its assessment. The influence of the neoliberalism (Giroux, 1999, 2005, 2014) has subverted and filed away the values-driven exemplary principles, practices, and thinking that emerged in the 1980s and 90s. While many reports and publications have been written since then, minimal progress has been made in developing educational environments that embrace and utilize exemplary assessment practices to improve student learning. The new knowledge and perspective gained through this study is needed to reframe the conversation from how to use specific assessment tools or systems to how assessment practices and results can support and enhance student affairs educators' effort and affect in their work with students as well as honor the mission and values of the profession and educational institutions. The intent and effect of assessment must be aligned for it to be worthwhile and meaningful. Once there is alignment between educational values and the philosophical approach to assessment, student affairs can begin to address secondary issues that prevent student affairs educators from embracing assessment as critical to their work. Our profession needs to step back from the tasks and practices to make sense of and correct issues with the larger assessment movement.

The integration of assessment of student learning and development in student affairs is a major challenge for the profession (Astin & Antonio, 2012; Ewell, 2009; Keeling, Wall, Underhile, & Dungy, 2008; Terenzini, 1989). Numerous publications, conferences, webinars, and other resources are regularly produced and offered by professional associations and assessment scholars to aid student affairs educators in gaining the knowledge and expertise needed to conduct assessment. Yet as a whole, divisions of student affairs, as well as their institutions, are slow to integrate and change assessment practices, particularly in terms of recognizing that evaluating teaching and institutional operations are different than assessing students' learning (Huba & Freed, 2000). The constant accountability rhetoric limits the value of education to measurements of cost and worth of colleges and universities. These pressures narrow the focus and intent of higher education's assessment to simple metrics and minimize the perspective and control of the assessors. "The fact that the origins of the push towards assessment are external to most campuses is significant" (Terenzini, 1989, p. 644). Assessment is dictated by externally imposed expectations and, consequently, student affairs educators acknowledge the need for assessment but possess limited ownership in assessment work and results.

On a larger scale, given the long history of assessment addressed in student affairs foundational documents (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010) and the most recent assessment push that began in the 1970s (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996), it is baffling that assessment of student learning and development is still not common practice for student affairs educators. I argue that we have been so caught in the technical aspects of assessment that we are blind to the more complex and nuanced pressure placed on education by external

entities like the government and corporations that direct the focus and rhetoric of assessment in global terms. Even as I began this study, I thought I elevated the research out of the current technical focused discourse, but as the study evolved so did my understanding of the pervasive and encompassing nature of the technical, neoliberal-driven power over education and its assessment, specifically in light of Giroux's (1999, 2005, 2014) thinking on neoliberalism. I did not initially elevate the research enough.

In an era of neoliberalism, U.S. society and economy are directed by large corporations and market-driven values, "promoting the virtues of an unbridled individualism almost pathological in its distain for community, social responsibility, public values, and the public good" (Giroux, 2014, p. 2). Neoliberalism stands in direct opposition to the values of education and democracy, and as such it works to undermine the value of education in society through accountability rhetoric, which is masked with common sense language that encourages individuals to seek what is promised to them in the capitalist culture (Giroux, 2014). Neoliberalists are also

> …attempting to restructure how higher education is organized. In doing so, they are putting in place modes of governance that mimic corporate structures by increasing the power of administrators at the expense of faculty, reducing faculty to a mostly temporary and low-wage workforce, and reducing students to consumers—ripe for being trained for low-skilled jobs and at-risk for incurring large student loans. (p. 6)

Neoliberalism uses assessment to monitor and prepare students for corporate jobs, but not high-skilled or well-paying jobs that are held for elite members of society; assessment is used as a tool to control the educational system and its students to benefit corporations. Student affairs, and higher education, do not recognize the affects neoliberalism has on education and all the individuals that comprise it, including administrators, faculty, and

students. If student affairs and higher education continue failing to recognize neoliberalism as a significant influence, its fundamental threat to core values and educational missions will become a sad reality. So, while there are numerous technical questions and concerns with conducting assessments, none of the answers matter if the assessment activities are dismantling education instead of enhancing student learning and development. Higher education, specifically student affairs for the purposes of this study, must lift its head from focusing on the technical aspects of assessment to addressing the greater philosophical and foundational concerns of how the neoliberal economy and other pressures are manipulating assessment to gain control over education and to use it to advance its goals, values, and purpose of individualism and greed. Assessment that improves student learning, honors the mission and values of student affairs, and is meaningful for student affairs educators cannot exist in the neoliberal economy without a conscious and direct fight to defend higher education as a democratic enterprise that cares for the common good.

As alluded to, I began this study with the goal of giving voice to the "other" side of assessment, the non-technical, non-accountability focused aspect of educators' commitment to improvement, but I realized I was not going deep enough to address my greater concern with the lack of assessment within the profession. The accountability approach to assessment, versus the internal commitment to improvement approach, is stronger and more commonly known because of the significant influence neoliberalism has on society, including education. Accountability is a powerful tool used by neoliberalism to assert its ideals and values, thus accountability becomes the focus and priority of how assessment is understood and infused. The larger conversation about

assessment is so focused on accountability that the role and voice of student affairs

educators who conduct assessment and work directly with students is overshadowed. My

research initially focused on exploring the individual motivation and collective

prioritization of assessment of student learning and development by division of student

affairs educators who engage in transformative assessment, or at least external appear to

engage in the work. I developed and utilized a multistep process to identify one division

of student affairs that externally demonstrates a commitment to assessment. Often the last

step in assessment processes and plans is communicating information and results, so if a

division is completing this task they have likely completed the other previous steps. I

conducted a case study of one division of student affairs, at Manresa University (the

selective liberal arts institution upon which I base my research), to learn about the

perspective and priorities of individual staff members on assessment and how they

attempt to navigate the challenging task of incorporating assessment of student learning

and development into their work. I focus on one case to dive deep in the operations of the

division and learn about the staff members and how they understand and view assessment

of student learning and development, on both macro- and micro-levels. However, through

my study I began to see the issue was bigger than anticipated. Understanding and

analyzing the accountability and commitment to improvement goals, purposes, or forces

of assessment (Ewell, 2002, 2009; Keeling, 2006; Keeling et al., 2008; Love & Estanek,

2004; Terenzini, 1989) deserves attention, but that work must become secondary to

addressing the influence of neoliberalism on education.

I use Giroux' (1999, 2005, 2014) theorizing of neoliberalism in my study as a

theoretical frame through which to analyze my data in light of the greater pressures in

society that influence how assessment of student learning and development is defined, perceived, practiced, and utilized. The three central themes of the data are: (a) Jesuit institution and values, (b) excellence, and (c) resistance. Each theme is described and analyzed through at least two concepts of neoliberalism. Based on the analysis, I present four key findings to this study to offer insight and advice to divisions of student affairs who want to build a culture of assessment that honors student learning and the values of the profession by critiquing and resisting neoliberal pressures that are removing student learning from the focus of assessment. My findings are presented in the following categories: (a) value as the backbone of assessment, (b) student affairs educators' responsibility in assessment, (c) CSAO as assessment leader, and (d) importance of challenging the status quo.

Assessment, Evaluation, and Accountability

Assessment terms are often used interchangeably, but they are not the same. From a technical or practical standpoint, conflation of definitions makes the process less efficient and more challenging. But more importantly, from a philosophical or theoretical view, there is power in conflating terms and confusing those who want to engage in the work. When people are confused and overwhelmed by simply trying to understand assessment they can get frustrated and disengage from the work or with limited understanding of the topic they do not see how others are manipulating language and processes for their benefit. For the purpose of this study, establishing a philosophical difference between assessment (of student learning and development) and accountability is paramount to understanding the primary context and findings of my study. As such, I link evaluation and assessment but separate them from accountability.

Evaluation and assessment are two processes that support one another, but they have distinct purposes. The term evaluation is most often used when a judgment is applied within the educational setting. Evaluation is, "any effort to use assessment evidence to improve institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness" (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 19). Evaluation deals with making decisions of effectiveness based on data while the focus of assessment is on gathering evidence and data to describe, and subsequently improve, student learning (Angelo, 1999; Astin, 1991; Astin & Antonio, 2012; Banta & Associates, 2002; Bresciani, Zelna, & Anderson, 2004; Huba & Freed, 2000; Mentkowski & Associates, 2000; National Research Council, 2001; Suskie, 2009; Wehlburg, 2008). More specifically, assessment of student learning and development is defined as:

> the process of gathering and discussing information from multiple and diverse sources in order to develop a deep understanding of what students know, understand, and can do with their knowledge as a result of their educational experiences; the process culminates when assessment results are used to improve subsequent learning. (Huba & Freed, 2000, p. 8)

This definition, like others, showcases the role of the technical skills and human resources involved in assessment. The importance of those who assess is implied in this definition and reifies collaboration as central to conducting assessment. When seeking a case for this study, transformative assessment (Angelo, 1999, 2007; Wehlburg, 2008) sets the standard for the type of case and its assessment practices by recognizing human contributions to assessment and how learning is central to the work. Acknowledging and addressing the effects of neoliberalism on assessment is needed to make transformative assessment an authentic possibility. I discuss transformative assessment further in the *Review of the Literature*.

Set in opposition to assessment and evaluation, which can help monitor and enhance the mission and values of education, accountability encompasses all activity that is perceived as assessment but does not support the mission, values, and goals of education. Accountability is the umbrella term I use in this study to describe the efforts of those (usually) external to the education profession who want to manipulate the system for their gain. As an example of accountability, taken from the PK-12 system as it is so widely known, is the *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act of 2002*. It was touted as an effective assessment system that would improve education for all students in the U.S., but the silent pressure for the legislation came from large testing companies and textbook distributors who would profit significantly from a massive educational overhaul (Metcalf, 2008). In addition, the monitoring of schools' test scores offered new data about the effectiveness of schools and use of taxpayers' dollars. Regardless of effects on students, *NCLB* developed into a major system of holding schools accountable to business-like metrics while seeing minimal gains in student learning. This is accountability. Accountability is an external, mathematical (and therefore inhuman), business-like approach that operates on a different value system than assessment of student learning and development.

Statement of the Problem

Student affairs, like higher education, does not have ownership over assessment. This is problematic on two primary levels, large scale control of assessment and profession-based buy-in. Student affairs does not recognize that assessment is operating as an external process to education that is imposed as a system of accountability. Higher education is not fully aware of all the external controls affecting the educational system

and all related parts, like assessment. Further, because of the greater control

neoliberalism has on society, the voices that challenge current "assessment" operations

and practices are quickly labeled as extremists or un-American for not upholding

American values, which in this case are promises of the capitalist economy. Therefore,

there is no public dialogue or dissension about the effectiveness, value, or outcomes of

current assessment activities, or lack thereof, which results in neoliberals maintaining

control and advancing a narrow agenda that clashes with educational traditional values.

On a secondary level, the overall approach to incorporating assessment into

higher education and student affairs does not reflect assessment best practices because of

the dominance of the accountability rhetoric and demands. For example, assessment is

effective when it is a collaborative effort and process that addresses issues that matter to

those involved and improves student learning (American Association of Higher

Education, 1992; Huba & Freed, 2000). Isolated practices encouraged in the neoliberal

culture result in poor, unmotivated work, or, worse yet, no work at all. Further, little is

written about how student affairs successfully can expand the assessment conversations

within divisions of student affairs to include staff members in the process. There is a gap

in the literature regarding each of these problems, mostly because there is limited critique

or debate on the role and purpose of assessment within higher education.

Student affairs, as a profession, establishes assessment as valuable to its work and

true assessment of student learning and development aligns with the values of student

affairs. The values of assessment, like being student-focused, values-driven, and

collaborative, parallel the values of student affairs. Assessment should be more

successful and pervasive in student affairs than it is, but it continues to be an area of

challenge and growth. In the current environment, student affairs educators do not recognize the value assessment practices have in their work nor do they see how the values of student affairs can be honored and incorporated to drive the work. Addressing the presence and effect of accountability on assessment will hopefully minimize the challenges student affairs educators have in realizing the goals of assessment by improving the learning and development of students on campus.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study grew from the need to define and describe the gaps in assessment of student learning and development practice within divisions of student affairs to advance the discourse and increase the frequency of assessment activities. But as the study evolved, the primary purpose of my study became to name and describe the greater social context that prevents assessment from fulfilling its purpose: to improve student learning. Instead of adding to best practice claims or tools and techniques for conducting assessments in student affairs, I offer insight into how a division of student affairs interprets and responds to accountability pressures and struggles to engage in assessment of student learning and development due to neoliberalism's extended control over assessment. Understanding the context in which assessment occurs offers new direction and guidance for how student affairs, and higher education can begin to address accountability efforts and replace them with assessment of student learning and development. Angelo's (1999) article, *Doing Assessment as if Learning Matters Most*, captures a component of my study through his recognition that current issues and struggles with assessment are not for lack of resources on assessment but limited attention given to understanding assessment itself. He states,

> To improve learning and promote learning communities, we must recognize that successful assessment is not primarily a question of technical skill, but rather one of human will…Already existing assessment techniques and methods are more than sufficient to meet the challenges we face. (Angelo, 1999, p. 4)

More specifically, examining assessment as a question of "human will," or individual and collective motivation and prioritization, opposed to just a "technical skill," illuminates the motivation of those involved in assessment. We have assumed that everyone involved in assessment is looking out for the best interest of higher education because of the benefits it offers society, but that is not the case.

This case study research, therefore, addresses a gap in the discourse and literature by examining the individual and collective human contributions to assessment. Assessment of student learning and development, similar to other complex issues faced in education, is seen as a technical challenge, one with easy identifiable issues and answers, instead of adaptive challenges that require careful time and attention to identify the issue at hand before speculating about potential solutions (Heifetz, 1994; Heifetz, Linsky, & Grashow, 2009). Through analyzing and interpreting Manresa's division of student affairs' assessment practices and reinterpreting the themes and data of my study through Giroux' (1999, 2005, 2014) conceptual framework of neoliberalism, I offer insights into how we can see and understand assessment differently to begin to name the disconnect and tackle the real problem of why assessment of student learning and development is not happening. The current approach to assessment does not honor the values of the profession and respective institutions and therefore should not be incorporated into practice, but a new learning-centered approach is one that could find great success.

Research Question

From the onset of the study, I addressed untouched or minority aspects of the assessment discourse, but as it evolved that became truer. The original research question I used when collecting data was: how is a culture of assessing student learning and development created and sustained in a representative university's division of student affairs, in non-technical terms? The following ancillary questions were used to lend further structure by guiding me to explore the imbedded layers of the question.

- What skills, training, and support do this university's student affairs educators receive from the division of student affairs (as an entity) to engage in assessment of student learning and development?

- How do this university's student affairs educators perceive and perform their roles in improving student learning and development through assessment efforts?

- How do student affairs educators at this university define the role of assessment of student learning and development in their work?

- What key elements (i.e., knowledge, skills, motivation) contribute to this university's student affairs educators engaging in transformative assessment practices?

- What are this university's necessary components of divisional assessment of student learning and development work?

However, these questions were abandoned past the data collection phase. Consistent with the emergent methodological nature of qualitative inquiry, when I realized staying with these questions limited the intent and potential of my study, as they are highly technical, I refocused. I centered my attention on framing the study in non-technical terms and constraints, and articulated the research question at the heart of my study that does not confine my thinking or analysis of assessment. Therefore, the overarching research question that guides my study is: why is assessment not pervasive or consistent practice within student affairs?

Significance of the Study

As a field, student affairs is failing to see the full picture, which is preventing them from learning how to address the persistent problem that assessment is not more useful and used. Assessment practices are most effective when they are on-going and infused into professional practices in a manner that enhances the mission of the institution (AAHE, 1992; Bresciani et al., 2004; Suskie, 2009; Wehlburg, 2008). The authors of the notable foundational documents of the student affairs profession, like the American Council on Education (1937, 1949), note the principles of quality assessment practices and speak to student affairs educators' duty to develop the whole student. Current professional publications also call for student affairs' role in assessment and challenge the profession and its educators to lead assessment and evaluation efforts on campuses [e.g., *Learning Reconsidered* (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2004); *Assessment Reconsidered* (Keeling et al., 2008)] because of student affairs educators' understanding of student development theory and how conducive partnership and communication are in the student affairs organizational structure. Student affairs theoretically is positioned and ready to engage in and lead assessment of student learning and development efforts, but there is an unspoken and unaddressed blockade that is both fortunately and unfortunately preventing this from happening. Current assessment practices are being actively manipulated by neoliberals to remove student learning as a priority and replace it with accountability and business metrics that devalue and misplace the mission and values of education. As such, education benefits by failing fully to adopt current assessment practices, but if current practices go unchecked they will eventually become standard

practice. My study opens a new door so we may begin to address fundamental concerns with how assessment is being communicated and conducted.

In opposition to the neoliberal meta-narrative, tools and techniques are not enough and, as the only types of research being published, truncate the depth of research on assessment of student learning and development. This study plays a significant role in opening our eyes to an aspect of assessment that is unacknowledged but is foundational to how assessment is viewed and conducted. Educators are not in control of assessment and how it is used, and as such current efforts are not honoring the values and purposes of assessment, student affairs, and higher education. Through the story of one division of student affairs, I describe how they view assessment and are grappling with the incongruence they face, with varying motives and priorities, within the division to embrace or resist assessment. I intentionally do not mention specific assessment practices, methods, measures, or tools to expose their non-technical components of assessing student learning and development. My findings will assist other divisions of student affairs in how they view assessment and can approach building or enhancing a culture that values assessing student learning and development for the sake of students and learning.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

A comprehensive literature review is critical to framing a strong, rigorous research study because it provides context for the research question and situates the study as addressing a gap in existing literature. Strauss and Corbin (1998) note, "…literature can hinder creativity if it is allowed to stand between the researcher and the data. But if it is used as an analytic tool, then it can foster conceptualization" (p. 53). I completed a thorough literature review of student affairs and higher education assessment of student learning and development prior to conducting this study to frame my understanding of assessment of student learning and development and prepare my mind to observe its related elements. I reviewed additional literature while analyzing the data to situate my analysis and findings in current literature.

In this chapter I argue the understanding of assessment and its purpose as a one-sided story about accountability is inaccurate, and as such is damaging to assessment achieving its purpose of improved student learning as well as being fully adopted by student affairs educators as meaningful work. The chapter begins with establishing the historical roots of assessment within student affairs and how key professional publications describe and validate the importance of assessment as a practice and responsibility of student affairs educators. Beyond the guidance and directives provided in the historical documents, the first theme certifies the importance of this study in

establishing assessment as a critical function of student affairs and its professionals. The second theme, Assessment within Divisions of Student Affairs, builds on the first to expose the gap that exists between the responsibility of student affairs educators to assess and the void of assessment practice within the field. There is minimal assessment practiced within student affairs and the reasons for this deficiency are unclear to most because they see numerous resources and tools available to conduct the work. What they are not considering is how the role of the people, their opinions and values, affect assessment and its success. The Chief Student Affairs Officer (CSAO) as the leader and manager of a division of student affairs plays a crucial role in how members of his or her staff view and conduct assessment of student learning and development. Therefore, in the subsequent section, Leadership in Student Affairs Assessment, I address how valuable the support of the CSAO is to building a culture of assessment within a division. These initial themes build on one another to demonstrate that assessment is not simply about accountability or a one-sided technical issue that does not resonant with student affairs educators. These sides are further defined and discussed in the Dichotomous Frameworks theme in which I breakdown four aspects of assessment that expand the assessment paradigm to be inclusive of non-technical assessment components. Finally, I connect building a culture of assessment within a division of student affairs to organizational culture literature as a vehicle for understanding how people influence organizations and their practices.

History and Purpose of Assessment in Student Affairs

In this section I discuss the significant student affairs documents and the direction they provide to student affairs educators in conducting assessment and evaluation. The

long, established history of assessment in student affairs validates the importance of the work as well as offers guidance on its purpose, value, and significance. The history of assessment and evaluation in student affairs is longer than most student affairs professionals believe. During the past three decades there has been consistent focus on the topic of assessment, making it a highly recognizable issue within student affairs and what most assume to be a recent trend. However, the founding and seminal documents of the profession all acknowledge assessment and evaluation as responsibilities of student affairs educators as well as offer direction to the purpose or goal of the assessment activities. Additionally, over time, the authors of the documents began to provide rationale and motive for why assessment is important. Student affairs has a time-honored history directing its members to engage in values-based assessment for the sake of students and their learning and experience, and understanding this history is significant in influencing how student affairs educators approach and conduct assessment. Hence, in this section I establish assessment in student affairs as critical, not optional, to the profession and the students it serves.

The Founding

The founding documents of the student affairs profession, *The Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV) of 1937 and 1949*, clearly establish the need and value of evaluating programs and students' experience as an important component of student affairs work. The most notable statements about evaluation in the *SPPV, 1949* are that evaluation is the responsibility of each staff member and that he or she should spend considerable time on this responsibility. Further, the authors also provide direction and purpose for student affairs staff members in this work.

> The test of effectiveness of any personnel service lies in the difference it makes in the development of individual students, and every worker must develop his own workaday yardstick for evaluation…No single criterion, alone and independent of others would probably have much validity, but taken together they may provide an effective working relationship among staff members with respect to their program responsibilities. (ACE, 1949, p. 33)

While the words center on evaluation and effectiveness, the measure of success is the "development of individual students" (p. 33), a precursor to current-day assessment of student learning and development. In addition, they articulate the value of utilizing multiple criteria or approaches to share information among staff members and improve their work. Ultimately, while language and knowledge about assessment has evolved, the founding documents of student affairs have directed student affairs educators from the beginning on the need, value, and purpose of assessment.

The 1970s

In the 1970s several publications affirmed, clarified, and built on foundational concepts presented in the *SPPV of 1937* and *1949*. With a couple decades of practice in the new field of student affairs, advancements in approach, philosophy, and theory as well as within education and society needed to be incorporated into how the profession defined and promoted itself. ACPA commissioned the *Student Development in Tomorrow's Higher Education: A Return to the Academy (T.H.E. Project, Phase 1)* in 1972 and followed up with its own report, *A Student Development Model for Student Affairs in Tomorrow's Higher Education,* as Phase 2 in 1975. Among a myriad of other critical elements described in these documents, a few of importance regarding the evolution of assessment in the field are: (a) the nature of learning needs to be better understood to achieve educational goals; (b) staff members are to be more proactive and

less reactive in their work; (c) new roles for staff members include behavioral scientist and researcher; and (d) assessment should not simply provide information about students but be a process that includes them (ACPA, 1975; Brown, 1972). Inductively, these statements guide student affairs educators to be more thoughtful, proactive, and learning-oriented in their work and conducting assessment. Additionally, the authors made a point to direct student affairs educators to include students in assessment, not simply conduct assessment about or on them.

The development of students was also better defined to provide guidance on how to assist students in developing, which further focuses the purpose and practice of student affairs educators. Also published in 1975, the Council of Student Personnel Associations (COSPA) published the *Student Development Services in Post-Secondary Education* to advance the importance of human development and its theoretical approaches in student personnel work. Additionally, COSPA (1975) asserts student personnel's ability to assist in assessment that measures progress toward goals. The purpose of assessment was challenged to expand and deepen beyond programmatic assessment outlined a few decades prior to understand and enhance students' learning and development.

The transition in rhetoric and evolution of assessment made way for the birth of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) in 1979, originally named the Council for the Advancement of Standards for Student Services/Development Programs. CAS, a consortium of student affairs professional associations, provides functional standards for higher education programs and services. While establishing nationally accepted standards and guidelines for programs and services, CAS encourages self-assessment by institutions, which allows for unique needs

and audiences of departments or offices and institutions. CAS is not intended to be a one-size-fits-all initiative. CAS began in the '70s but its publications were not printed until the 80s.

The 80s and 90s

The 1980s and 1990s, the birth time frame of the current assessment movement, brought two foundational documents to student affairs. In 1987, NASPA published *A Perspective on Student Affairs* in honor of the 50th anniversary of the *SPPV of 1937* to address historical changes, new contextual factors, and updated assumptions and beliefs of the profession. While there is minimal information about assessment in this document, it acknowledges for the first time the role external pressure on higher education has on institutions and affirms that student affairs staff members are expected to assess "educational and social experiences of students to improve institutional program" (NASPA, 1987, p. 12). In 1994, ACPA penned the *Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs,* which altered professional and assessment language in student affairs. First, the authors clearly state that learning, personnel development, and student development are integral and integrated elements of student affairs. Thus began the association of student learning *and* development. Second, assessment work expanded beyond programmatic enhancement to include student outcomes. Essentially, student affairs programs and services must intentionally establish, oversee, and assess student learning and development outcomes, which is a historic mark in student affairs assessment. The next decade of publications continued to reify and expand the core concepts established in the *Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs.*

21ˢᵗ Century

     To date, in the 21ˢᵗ century there are three notable student affairs' publications

that directly or indirectly address assessment of student learning and development. First,

Learning Reconsidered: A Campus-Wide Focus on the Student Experience (ACPA &

NASPA, 2004) "emphasizes the nature, characteristics, meaning, and application of the

work of student affairs as a partner in the broader campus curriculum and describes the

ways in which student affairs affects student outcomes" (p. 3). This document affirms the

importance of student outcomes in student affairs work as well as the need to understand

and partner with colleagues across campus, specifically academic affairs, in achieving the

outcomes established in the campus curriculum, which deepens the need and scope for

quality student affairs assessment practices. Further, student affairs is called to lead

institutional student learning assessment, not just student satisfaction, efforts (ACPA &

NASPA, 2004). Beyond the direction for how to engage and lead assessment efforts on

campus, *Learning Reconsidered* furthers the rhetoric of previous publications and reports

by acknowledging accountability to external and internal standards matters, and

represents both reasonable motive and rationale for conducting assessment.

> Regardless of our past accomplishments and disappointments, we are all, as
> colleagues and educators, now accountable to students and society for identifying
> and achieving essential student learning outcomes and for making transformative
> education possible and accessible for all students. (p. 3)

If it was not clear before, it is now; assessment of student learning and development

outcomes is said to be critical and integral to the future of higher education.

     Finally, in an effort to educate student affairs educators on the concepts,

knowledge, and skills of assessment and effectiveness and offer practical advice, the two

major student affairs professional associations—NASPA and the American College

Personnel Association (ACPA)—support or author assessment-based publications, the

first of their kind for the profession. In 2006, ACPA developed the *ACPA ASK Project:*

Assessment Skills and Knowledge Content Standards for Student Affairs Practitioners

and Scholars to document and communicate the needed assessment-based competencies

student affairs educators should seek effectively to engage in assessment. With this

publication, individual student affairs educators as well as divisions of student affairs

have the guidance they need to development assessment knowledge and skills, and

cannot use lack of guidance as an excuse for not assessing student learning and

development. Second, NASPA in conjunction with other groups supported the creation of

two publications for student affairs, *Assessment Reconsidered: Institutional Effectiveness*

for Student Success (Keeling et al., 2008) and *Building a Culture of Evidence in Student*

Affairs: A Guide for Leaders and Practitioners (Culp & Dungy, 2012). These

publications establish the context, purpose, and direction for student affairs educators to

engage in effective assessment of student learning and development.

Summary

Student affairs has adapted and adopted its assessment practices throughout its

history to honor its mission and work as well as provide the best experience for students.

The existence of entire publications, not simply segments, on the role and need for

assessment of student learning and development in student affairs demonstrates the

growth and evolution of assessment within the profession. Student affairs has always

directed its professionals to be mindful about the quality of programs and the student

experience, but based on the language of the profession's guiding documents it is to be an

essential function and aspect of their work (Schuh & Gansemer-Topt, 2010). The

language about the need to conduct assessment to respond to accountability issues began

in the late '80s, but it does not overshadow the work or the language used to discuss

assessment. Philosophically, student affairs acknowledges accountability but does not

center its assessment on it, which is clear in the following statement about *Learning*

Reconsidered: Institutional Effectiveness for Student Success.

> While this book acknowledges and responds to greater expectations for
> institutional accountability; its focus is on building capacity to engage in
> evidence-based, reflective practice and supporting educators in doing their best
> work. (Keeling et al., 2008, back cover)

Assessment has a clear position within student affairs based on its founding and seminal

publications and reports, as a responsibility and duty of all student affairs educators.

However, the prioritization of assessment only establishes the value and need for the

work, it does not clarify its purpose and function. While assessment receives great

attention and focus, it continues to be a misunderstood and confusing process.

Dichotomous Frameworks

There are dichotomous relationships between the purposes, understanding, and

uses of assessment, which affect how student affairs educators perceive, engage and

respond to assessment. The driving forces behind assessment are: calls for accountability

and commitments to improvement by educators (Ewell, 2002, 2009; Keeling, 2006;

Keeling et al., 2008; Love & Estanek, 2004; Terenzini, 1989), which shape the purpose

of assessment because driving forces behind an action influence how the action is view

and completed. In terms of understanding of assessment, Angelo (1999) introduces the

personnel aspects of assessing student learning by conceiving that engaging in

transformative assessment is not only about acquisition of technical skills but that it requires development of human will for the work. As for the use of assessment, it can be seen as a tool for measurement or as a structure for judging achievement (Joughin, 2009). Both have starkly different implications on practice. In addition, Astin and Antonio (2012) posit there are three approaches to achieving educational excellence, with resource and reputational excellence on one side and talent development on the other. Overall, the dichotomy places technical, resource-driven forces on one side and human-development forces on the other. These do not necessarily need to be dichotomous relationships, but the context for each tends to be setup in opposition to the other. In this section, I discuss four prevailing umbrella frameworks—driving forces, transformative assessment, intended use, and education excellence—that define how student affairs educators understand assessment as well as establish that the majority of literature or resources exist on the technical side of the dichotomies.

Driving Forces that Influence the Purpose of Assessment

Two currently discussed forces, or approaches, capture the two prevailing thoughts on assessment: accountability and commitments to improvement by educators (Ewell, 2002, 2009; Keeling, 2006; Keeling, et al., 2008; Love & Estanek, 2004; Terenzini, 1989). The accountability calls are louder, more frequent, come mostly from external constituents, and overshadow the internal commitment to improvement held by educators. Accountability encompasses all demands and expectations placed on education by internal and external stakeholders to meet the desired standards of affordable education, quality employees for the workplace, and active citizens to support communities. Accountability is not new to education. Members of U.S. society have

challenged the role, purpose, and outcomes of higher education throughout its history

(Garfield & Corcoran, 1986). However, as the cost of higher education continually and

consistently rises at unprecedented rates (Blimling, 1999), stakeholders are more vocal

about their demands for accountability.

On the other, rarely-discussed-in-public side there is a strong internal

commitment by student affairs educators to focus on improvement and excellence within

higher education. Many educators are committed to improving their work, enhancing

student learning, and contributing collectively to the knowledge of student learning and

development, regardless of accountability pressures (Angelo, 1999; Astin & Antonio,

2012; Ewell, 2002, 2009; Keeling, 2006; Keeling et al., 2008; Peck, 2010). Student

affairs educators engage in various levels of informal and formal assessments and

program evaluations, program enhancement, and guided reflection discussions with

students regarding their learning to improve their activities, programs, departments, and

services because they value their work and its outcomes as well as believe their work

makes a difference in the lives of students, and ultimately society. Most student affairs

educators are aware of the external expectations and demands of students, other

stakeholders, accrediting bodies, various levels of government, and professional-

discipline-based associations working diligently to surpass expectations. They largely

have respect for their fields and the value higher education's mission, and specifically

student affairs' contributions to society; therefore, they take great care and pride in their

work, supporting students and their learning.

How student affairs educators view assessment influences their understanding of

its purpose and how they conduct it (Astin & Antonio, 2012). What educators view as the

reason to engage in assessment dictates how and how often they assess. Engaging in assessment feels very different when an educator can direct and customize the assessment activities for their environment and students compared to when they are required to complete an externally imposed survey or assessment instrument. As an example for how a driving force dictates function, there are two opposing views on the purpose and science of education, made famous by the debate between two scholars, John Dewey and Edward Thorndike. The divide between these two stems from Dewey's view that education is a system that can support democracy through development of critical thinkers and Thorndike's view that education is a system built on organizational management and science to meet changing economic needs of the state (Tomlinson, 1997). Educational historian Ellen C. Lagermann (1989) opines, "One cannot understand the history of education in the United States during the twentieth century unless one realizes that Edward L. Thorndike won and John Dewey lost" (p. 185). Thorndike's mechanistic view of learning trumped Dewey's humanistic view in the late half of the 20th century and continues to do so today (Gibboney, 2006), evidenced by the implementation of the mechanistic system embodied in the College Scorecard (U.S. Department of Education, 2013) and other government initiatives. Essentially Thorndike argues one need not be an educator to "decide what to teach, how to teach it, and how to evaluate it" (Gibboney, 2006, p. 170), but that "the possibility of a science of education" (p. 170) is powerful enough for "experts" or the highly educated to govern the educational system. Thorndike's work paved the way for joining neoliberalism's aims with higher education; he opened the door for those outside education to control the educational system.

So while there are two primary motives or forces to engage in assessment, accountability pressures have won, just like Thorndike—and partly because Thorndike won. Accountability rhetoric dominates and influences assessment and how educators interpret the purpose of assessment. Further, the whispers of economic benefit associated with higher education are traditionally not discussed expressly or publically, but economic forces play a significant role in how education and all its functions like assessment are evaluated (Giroux, 1999, 2014). The only place to find writing on educators' commitment to improvement is in assessment literature, and even within that literature this message is it not confidently communicated as a top motive.

> Left unaddressed by these developments [infiltration of simple standardized test and benchmarks in a world of complex learning] is that second—and, we would argue, more pressing—motive for assessment: a commitment among educators and administrators *within* colleges and universities to do good work, promote student success, use resources effectively, provide a sound student experience, and serve the public good. While the consistency, depth, and sustainability of those commitments across the spectrum of faculty members, student affairs professionals, and leaders in higher education many vary substantially, it would be wrong to overlook or discount their importance. (Keeling et al., 2008, pp. 2–3)

Keeling, Wall, Underhile, and Dungy (2008) assert commitment to improvement among educators is a more pressing motive than accountability, yet in the next sentence they share concerns about educators' commitment and offer a weak argument for looking to commitment to improvement. The "wrongness" of failing to consider the role of educators' commitment to improvement as significant to the purpose and function of assessment is not enough to combat the strength of the accountability argument and rhetoric. Almost a decade earlier, Angelo (1999) shares that through the work of many dedicated, intelligent folks "accountability matters, [but] learning still matters most" (p. 1). Angelo's argument is slightly more convincing, but is minimized by the fact the

assessment is not much further along than when he writes these words. Focusing on the internal commitment to improvement among educators is important to putting the responsibility of conducting and communicating assessment and upholding the values of their institutions into their hands.

Transformative Assessment

All types of assessment are centered on student learning, but transformative assessment recognizes the role of the assessor and provides guidance to the challenging task of assessing. In 1999, Angelo initially posited there are *Four Pillars of Transformative Assessment* that provide direction for engaging educators in assessment practices, but Angelo (2007) later updated the pillars to reflect his more thorough understanding of transformative assessment. The core elements of Angelo's (2007) transformative guidelines are: (a) build shared trust, (b) build a shared language, (c) build shared motivation, (d) design backward; plan forward, (e) fix structures and processes first, (f) develop organizational and individual capacity and culture, and (g) take a scholarly approach. These seven guidelines incorporate aspects of leadership and organizational change in addition to being grounded in effective, technical-based approaches to assessment, like those offered in AAHE, 2003; Astin, 1991, 2002; Astin & Antonio, 2012; Banta & Associates, 2002; Bresciani et al., 2004; National Research Council, 2001; and Suskie, 2009.

Thomas Angelo recognizes the value-based nature of assessment, and in 1999 he addresses two reasons another assessment scholar, Peter Ewell (1997), offers as to why the assessment movement has not been more successful to date. In Angelo's (1999) response he becomes the first to say that part of the problem stems from a technical or

"mechanistic, 'additive' model of assessment" (p. 2). To move beyond existing

assessment methods that are sufficient, technical skills, and desired end results of

winning or obtaining other extrinsic rewards, Angelo (1999) posits the current assessment

culture should be replace by a "'transformative' assessment-as-culture-change model" (p.

3) that centers on learning communities, where learning is the pinnacle priority. He

further asserts that,

> we must recognize that successful assessment is not primarily a question of
> technical skill, but rather one of human will…. That is, all the assessment
> techniques we've developed are of little use unless and until our local academic
> cultures value self-examination, reflection, and continuous improvement. (p. 5)

Through defining transformative assessment, Angelo (1999) takes what was thought to be

a one-sided issue, conducting assessment as a technical task, and establishes it as at least

two-sided by validating the role of the assessor and his or her environment in the process.

While his work was published in the late 1990s, Angelo presented on this material

(slightly updated) in 2007. Angelo's (1999, 2007) work on transformative assessment is a

significant framework for understanding assessment because it illuminates unknown or

unspoken aspects of the assessment process, even if it establishes another problematical,

dichotomous relationship.

Wehlburg (2008) also advocates for transformative assessment, which she defines

as, "a process that will inform decision making that is appropriate, meaningful,

sustainable, flexible and ongoing and will use data for improvement with the potential for

substantive changes…. Transformative assessment is principally focused on how to

enhance student learning" (Wehlburg, 2008, p. 13). She, like Angelo (1999, 2007),

acknowledges the role and influence people have in the assessment process as they are

significant factors in deciding if: the assessment and its results are meaningful, create change, and enhance student learning; the infrastructure and resources are available (including themselves); and the will to sustain the effort is plausible. In sum, transformative assessment provides a framework for those who conduct assessment in providing direction and clarity of purpose. Transformative assessment respects the human and technical aspects of assessment, which are represented and valued in this study.

Intended Use

There are many intended and unintended uses of assessment methods and techniques, depending on who is requesting, conducting, and communicating the assessment. Yet, at its core, assessing produces data. How the data is used represents the belief system of the assessor(s). At the two ends of the intended use spectrum for assessment results are judgment and measurement. "*Assessment as judging achievement* draws attention to the nature of assessment as the exercise of professional judgment, standing in contrast to misplaced notions of assessment as *measurement*" (Joughin, 2009, p. 3). Judgment, as compared to measurement, centers on the learner, learning, and the assessor being familiar with the concepts and content of the assessment to make informed decisions (Joughin, 2009). Within the measurement paradigm and movement, there is little to no regard for learning thus separating itself from assessment; however, because of how standardized tests and measurement has infiltrated education, people assume measurement is assessment and treat it as such. Conflating measurement with assessment is dangerous for many reasons, beyond the fact they are not the same thing, but measurement is simply the gathering of information, and there is a "fundamental distinction here between the information we gather and the uses to which it is put" (Astin

& Antonio, 2012, p. 3). When measurement replaces or appears as judgment, evaluation, or assessment, the tool and its results are going beyond its use. For example, it is appropriate to report the number of community service hours completed by a group of students gathered through measuring (or counting) the number of hours reported by each student, but nothing exists within the measurement to provide additional information or assessment about the quality of the service, how much students or the community gained from the experience, or what students learned from the experience.

Educational Excellence

A commonality of educators' commitments to improvement and accountability is that excellence is valued and desirable. Astin and Antonio (2012) state there are three conceptions of excellence that govern higher education: resources, reputational, and talent development. In his earlier work, Astin (1985) established resources and reputational excellence as two views that govern educational policies and practices, but in recent years his thinking on the topic as evolved. First, to define the initial conceptions of excellence: resources conception is centered on the principle that an institution's accumulation of resources dictates its level of excellence (e.g., more money equals more excellence); and reputational conception is based on status of academic reputation (i.e. quality of faculty and students) determining excellence, again directly related (Astin, 1985). Second, the roles of these two conceptions of excellence are implicitly incorporated into educational policies and practices, mutually reinforcing, and benefit those with more resources (Astin & Antonio, 2012). The addition of talent development as a conception of excellence aligns and honors institutions' basic purpose of education and learning and is the definition of educational excellence (Astin & Antonio, 2012).

"The most excellent institutions are, in this view, those that have the greatest impact—'add the most value,' as economists would say—to the students' knowledge and personal development" (Astin & Antonio, 2012, p. 7). Direct relationships may exist between resource, reputational, and human development conceptions of excellence, but Astin and Antonio (2012) delineate the three because there is no evidence that points to the relationship between them, specifically human development with the other two conceptions. Offering these three distinct conceptions challenges assumptions about which institutions are achieving excellence for students, not themselves.

Summary: Technical versus Human

Each of the assessment frameworks discussed in this section address a different view and perspective on the role, purpose, and function of assessment. Taken together, these frameworks define the dichotomous relationship that exist within assessment that place the technical, mechanistic, and powerful aspects of assessment on one side (usually higher) on the spectrum with the human, adaptive, and development-minded aspects on the other. The technical side will continue to dominate the public sphere and rhetoric because of the money and power associated with elements on that side of the spectrum—resources behind accountability, development of technical tools and measures, and resource and reputational powers of institutions that are excellent by those definitions—unless this paradigm is shared and the role and value in education of the human development side is validated and communicated broadly. My study sheds new light on this unspoken paradigm and examines assessment from the subordinated viewpoint.

Assessment Within Divisions of Student Affairs

The history and intended purpose of assessment of student learning and development offers one perspective on the role of assessment within the profession, but to understand how assessment is perceived and conducted by student affairs educators' examination of assessment practice within divisions of student affairs is needed. In this section, I further analyze student affairs literature for direction and structure that direct practice as well as actual assessment practice. I paint a picture of the current status of assessment of student learning and development within student affairs as underperforming. I identify some of the challenges and gaps in student affairs assessment practices, but more importantly the issues presented exemplify the underlining issue is more than current literature, practice, and rhetoric not being effective or resonating with student affairs educators; there is a fundamental disconnect between how student affairs educators view the purpose of assessment of student learning and development and its practice. Only a few student affairs educators care about assessment of student learning and development, and the majority of them address assessment as a technical task, not as adaptive challenge (Heifetz, 1994). The understanding of and perspective on assessment in student affairs is limited and narrow, which does not allow student affairs educators to realize the use or full potential of assessment. Finally, I summarize the status of assessment of student learning and development within student affairs literature and practice as one that few care about and which struggles to be translated into effective practice.

Direction and Structure for Assessment

What is conceptually written about assessment, specifically in student affairs, shapes how student affairs educators understand and conduct assessment activities.

Student affairs educators look to the literature to learn about and seek guidance about how to engage in assessment practices. Assessment-specific publications are sparse and relatively new within student affairs; student affairs educators must look to general education assessment resources for depth and breath. There are less than 10 student affairs assessment specific texts, all penned in the last 20 years. Further, there are only three primary authors of these publications: Marilee J. Bresciani, John H. Schuh, and M. Lee Upcraft. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) provide the first text on student affairs assessment in their seminal publication, *Assessment in Student Affairs: A Guide for Practitioners*. This publication provides student affairs educators with context and direction for how to make sense of assessment, detailed information on seven primary dimensions of assessment, and general guidance on how to manage implementation of assessment. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) inform student affairs educators that assessment is more than student satisfaction and program improvement in sharing their dimensions of assessment, which are: (a) tracking, (b) needs, (c) satisfaction, (d) campus environments and student cultures, (e) outcomes, (f) comparable institutions (benchmarking), and (g) national standards. These dimensions are still the primary methods of conducting assessments within the profession, with satisfaction as most common (Bresciani et al., 2004).

Outcomes, or student learning outcomes, assessment is one of the types of assessment described by Upcraft and Schuh (1996). There has been a concerted effort since the early 2000s to encourage, and ultimately shift, student affairs educators beyond satisfaction and tracking to learning-based assessments. Bresciani, Zelna, and Anderson (2004) dedicate an entire chapter to helping student affairs educators move from assessing satisfaction to student learning and development. By 2010, Schuh and

Gansemer-Topf assert assessment activities evolve to include student learning in co-curricular experiences, but there is one important caveat to this statement: "student affairs practice in assessing and evaluating student experience, at least conceptually, has moved from evaluating students' use of and participation in services and programs to measuring how programs and experiences contribute to student's learning…" (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010, p. 6). "Conceptually" is the key word in this statement. Student affairs educators have the resources, support, and tools conceptually to engage in student learning outcomes assessment, but the level, frequency, and quality of assessing of student learning and development is unknown or limited, at best. Sections of assessment articles are designed to help student affairs educators address challenges in assessment of student learning and development. However, the point still stands that student affairs educators are to engage in assessing student learning and development to contribute to the overall student learning assessment efforts on campus (Schuh & Gansemer-Topf, 2010).

There is little research on student affairs assessment practices and accountability pressures that affect assessment. The most significant research prior to my study is a case study conducted in 2005, when Green, Jones, and Aloi examined high-quality assessment practices in three divisions of student affairs. Different than this study, they looked specifically at the act of assessment to increase understanding of assessment practices to aid other divisions in assessing the co-curricular (Green, Jones, & Aloi, 2008). Major findings of their study include: four levels of professional commitment—vice president, director/coordinator of assessment, assessment committee, and unit-level professional staff—are critical in fostering a shared commitment to assessment initiatives, and

decentralized, unit-based assessment is ideal for student affairs (Green, Jones, & Aloi, 2008). While they assert these four levels of commitment are needed, the researchers do not explore why the levels are important or how they can be significant in producing high-quality assessment practices. Further, Green et al. (2008) note the need for additional research on how student affairs educators can collaborate to enhance assessment efforts. This study recognizes and validates the important role individual student affairs educators and units/departments play in assessing student learning, but only begins to explore the value, need, and structure of student affairs educators in effective assessment of student learning and development practice.

Assessment in Practice

There is often a significant difference between what should be done and what is actually done, on numerous subjects; assessment in student affairs is no exception. There are several articles published on individual divisions, functional areas, and programs successfully implementing assessment of student learning and development into practice, like those authored by Aloi, Green, and Jones, 2007; Fishman, Gibson, Narui, and Nelson, 2009; Green, Jones, and Aloi, 2008; and Piper, 2007. There is not an overwhelming number of published examples of assessment in practice. Of the documents published, the majority contain stories about departments and programs that implement an assessment tool or practice into their operations or personal accounts of how leaders within an area approached and navigated asking staff members to conduct assessment.

Specifically looking at building a culture of assessment at the division level, as compared to the department or program level, is more challenging and nuanced because

of the increased number of staff members involved, varying departmental purposes and goals, and more complex analysis of the student experience. As one of few articles about creating a culture of assessment within a division of student affairs, Aloi, Green, and Jones' (2007) article outlines the steps taken by their division of student affairs under the direction and support of the vice president of student affairs to "embrace [the division's] role as educators who care about improving student learning" (p. 7). Elements and characteristics of their model to incorporate assessment into the division include:

> (1) a focus on student learning; (2) the involvement of representatives from every unit; (3) a commitment to regular staff development; (4) a team approach to developing unit assessment plans; and (5) the appointment of an assessment council to ensure the continuation of assessment efforts across the division. (p. 7)

Each element is important to building a culture and represents best practice, but they primarily address the technical aspects of creating a culture of assessment. Similar to guiding documents on how to conduct assessment, student affairs educators share and document the tasks they completed to implement assessment practices, not the personal and personnel development they manage to expand student affairs educators' attitudes and practices to value and engage in assessment of student learning and development. This work might be harder and more nuanced to communicate, but it is essential to offering a complete picture to develop a culture of assessment among student affairs educators.

The published examples provided advice or recommendations to other student affairs educators about how to prepare for and complete an assessment initiative, which can be helpful except context and culture of institutions play a significant role in assessment thus limiting applicability to other institutions. While assessment literature

affirms assessment is possible to conduct and can be helpful to improving aspects of

programs and services, the small number of publications about assessment initiated and

implemented in the field is staggeringly low. Based on the number of publications, there

is either minimal assessment conducted (successfully) in student affairs, those conducting

assessment do not have time to publish or research their activities, or some combination

thereof. Regardless, minimal information exists about assessment practice in student

affairs. This gap in literature is concerning considering the direction, support, and

resources available as well as the pressure to conduct and act upon assessment.

Leadership in Student Affairs Assessment

Leadership from the chief student affairs officers (CSAO) is important to the

advancement of assessing student learning and development within a division of student

affairs as the leadership and support of the CSAO is important given he or she leads the

organization. There is extensive literature on leadership and leading culture change, but

minimal literature addresses the role of leadership in student affairs assessment efforts.

The response of CSAOs on each campus to assessment makes a significant difference in

the success of assessment efforts within a division of student affairs. Moxley (1999)

provides a detailed insider's perspective on how The University of Texas at Arlington

built a strong student affairs assessment practice and culture. She notes the value of many

years of solid leadership and support for the division supplied by the CSAO to engage in

and evolve its assessment practices as significant to building a culture of assessment

(Moxley, 1999). When top-level administrators do not support assessment, it is difficult

for the rest of the staff to get on board or stay motivated to do the work. Green, Jones,

and Aloi (2008) also find in their research on high-quality assessment practices of student

affairs divisions that leadership is an important factor in sustaining assessment. As such, leadership, specifically that provided by the CSAO, is a critical factor to explore.

Within the student affairs assessment literature, comments about leadership and its value to assessment do not come from empirical work or from notable assessment authors but from practitioners in the field regarding their experiences. There are a few sections or chapters within scholarly publications about the role of leadership or "evaluation capacity building," which involves establishing an organizational culture that embraces and practices assessment at all levels (Huba & Freed, 2000; Keeling et al., 2008; Taylor-Powell & Boyd, 2008). However, these elements are not integrated into the steps or phases of assessment, they are treated as related but not integral to the process. The distinction between leadership being directly and indirectly connected to assessment is significant in how important leadership and the CSAO are to the process; enough research exists on how critical the CSAO is to establishing a culture of assessment that it cannot continue to be treated as a secondary element of the process. In *Assessment Practices in Student Affairs: An Application Manual*, Schuh and Upcraft (2001) outline 11 steps to do assessment, none of which reference non-technical advice like talking with colleagues or checking divisional goals to get support or direction that assist with developing a culture of assessment. Assessment is most effective when it is a collaborative process (Bresciani et al., 2004; Keeling et al., 2008), which requires leadership and navigating interpersonal interactions. Therefore, additional research is needed in the areas of leadership and the myriad human connections involved in engaging in effective assessment practices to validate the importance and power individuals have in conducting assessment. Examining leadership at a macro-level limits

individual leadership issues and allows for larger lessons to be learned about how leaders can approach and facilitate assessment. Using organizational culture literature is one way to elevate the leadership discussion to the macro-level.

Organizational Culture

My intent is not to situate this study in organizational culture literature but to draw on its theories and structures to assist in describing and defining significant components of the division's culture connected to assessment of student learning and development. Organizational culture research proves essential in understanding and analyzing organizations (Dauber, Fink, & Yolles, 2012; Schein, 1985; Tierney, 1988). It is an umbrella term "for a way of thinking that takes a serious interest in cultural and symbolic phenomena or aspects in organizations" (Alvesson, 2011, p. 11). Theories and models on organizational culture name, define, and situate important or influential elements that comprise the culture of an organization. Further, organizational culture literature focuses on understanding the culture of organizations to improve their functioning (Dauber et al., 2012; Schein, 1985, 2004; Tierney, 1988).

The organizational culture work of Schein, Tierney, Alvesson, and Dauber, Fink, and Yolles contributes to my understanding of organizational culture and its connection to how a division of student affairs, as an organization, can build a commitment, or culture, to assessing student learning and development. Schein's (1985) foundational work provides a simple yet insightful view into the role values play in an organization. He encapsulates the critical elements, relationships, and processes of an organizational culture into a three-part model that places espoused values between visible artifacts and basic underlying assumptions of an organization (Schein, 1985, 2004). In order to

understand the connection between visual manifestations of culture and their roots in the organization, we need to look at the espoused values of the organization. This understanding is critical for my study because it connects values and manifestations of value in actions. Further, actions or visible artifacts within an organization reflect its values and underlying assumptions, and vice versa. Therefore, I am mindful to examine the direction of influence between action and values within Manresa's division of student affairs regarding their assessment practices, specifically which drives the other.

Tierney's (1988) *Framework for Organizational Culture* and Dauber et al.'s (2012) *Configuration Model of Organizational Culture* expound on Schein's model. Their models move beyond the internal perspective on culture described Schein's model to factor in external environmental factors, functions of the organization, and change over time. First, Tierney's (1988) framework specifically situates organizational culture within the higher education environment. He establishes: (a) environment, (b) mission, (c) socialization, (d) information, (e) strategy, and (f) leadership as critical concepts of college and university organizational cultures (Tierney, 1988). As such, these concepts must be explored within the division of student affairs to gain a full picture of the organizational culture within the division of student affairs.

Second, the *Configuration Model of Organizational Culture* is designed to assist individuals in exploring "dynamic relationships between organization culture, strategy, structure, and operations of an organization (internal environment) and maps interactions with the external environment (task and legitimization environment)" (Dauber et al., 2012, p. 1) and the model has "well-defined processes, which connect the elements of the model systematically to each other" (p. 1). This model was built from analysis of four

exemplary and well-cited models in organizational culture literature (Dauber et al., 2012)

and offers a highly comprehensive model for examining and understanding

organizational culture. This model is important to my own work as it provides a structure

to connect the concepts of each of the organizational culture models presented as well as

to visualize the critical elements of the division of student affairs' organizational culture

and how they affect and connect with one another. For example, these models will aid in

my understanding of what forces are driving various elements of the organizational

culture, specifically if the motive to engage in assessment of student learning and

development is coming from within or outside the organization.

Summary

The themes (a) history and purpose of assessment in higher education; (b)

assessment within divisions of student affairs; (c) leadership in student affairs

assessment; (d) dichotomous frameworks; and (e) organizational culture, presented in my

review of the literature, each offer insight into assessment and its practice in student

affairs, but when taken together they provide context for and support my argument that

additional research is needed to understand the human-development side of assessment.

Research on the human-development side of the paradigm, on its own or when

juxtaposed with the technical side, will provide perspective and guidance to addressing

the ongoing struggle of why assessment of student learning and development is not more

incorporated and acculturated in the student affairs profession, specifically within

divisions of student affairs.

> Our assessment efforts are handicapped in part because we are not really clear
> about what we are trying to accomplish, and in part because we perpetuate
> questionable practices out of sheer habit, for convenience, or to fulfill purposes

that are unrelated, or at best, tangential to the basic mission of our colleges and universities. (Astin & Antonio, 2012, p. 1)

We must look to the non-technical aspects of assessment and education to address the field's handicap.

CHAPTER III

RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY

Assessment-related student affairs research and exemplary practices do not

sufficiently address how student affairs staff work together to assess student learning and

development (Angelo, 1999). I argue new research and perspective is needed to change

practice and alter the dialogue around assessment of student learning and development

toward transformative assessment because the role of staff members in the process has

not been adequately addressed. Assessment of student learning and development is a

relatively new concept for student affairs educators and requires additional training and

education for staff members to engage in the work thoughtfully and effectively. Before

the assessment tools, methods, and resources can be appropriately used, student affairs

educators want to see the need, value, and effect of assessment practices in their work.

Assessment discourse generally focuses on the accountability-commitment to

improvement paradigms and spectrum as a source of motivation or the rationale for

educators, including student affairs educators, engaging in assessment (Ewell, 2002,

2009; Keeling, 2006; Keeling et al., 2008; Love & Estanek, 2004; Terenzini, 1989). "To

improve learning and promote learning communities, we must recognize that successful

assessment is not primarily a question of technical skill, but rather one of human will"

(Angelo, 1999, p. 2). The simplistic motivation spectrum does not sufficiently address the

human will aspect of the assessment culture equation. One end of the spectrum

acknowledges the internal drive student affairs educators can have to focus on improve-

ment and growth while the other recognizes some engage in assessment to complete the

requirement, yet it is unknown why student affairs educators select from positions on this

scale. Transformative assessment takes into account the importance of people in the

assessment equation. Transformative assessment is characterized by a collective commit-

ment to improving student learning demonstrated by its integration into the practice by

each staff or faculty member, their communication with one another and how their work

is used to make substantive changes (Angelo, 1999; Wehlburg, 2008). Individual and

collective human will through the lens of culture is the center of this research.

   The purpose of this study began to describe how people within a single, bounded

system make meaning, work together, change practices, and create a culture of

assessment of student learning and development as a result of valuing assessment of

student learning and development. However, that purpose became secondary as the study

evolved. The primary purpose of my study is to name and describe the greater social

context that stands in the way of student affairs assessment, and likely all higher

education, fulfilling its role to improve student learning. My study addresses unspoken

issues in assessment that prevent it from being a part of student affairs practice. In this

chapter, I outline and justify why a qualitative interpretive case study was selected as my

methodology and how the research was conducted as a means to investigate the central

phenomenon of the study. Specifically, I outline my research questions, theoretical

perspective, describe the identification and selection of the research sample (or case),

research methods employed, and data analysis plan. In addition, I reveal and explore my

subjectivities in the context of this research.

Research Question

The heart of my research centers on exploring why is assessment not pervasive or consistent practice within student affairs within a single university's division of student affairs. The primary research question that guided my data collect is: how is a culture of assessing student learning and development created and sustained in a representative university's division of student affairs, in non-technical terms? To examine aspects of the university- and department-level culture, a complex and interconnected concept, the following ancillary questions guide my primary research question.

- What skills, training, and support do this university's student affairs educators receive from the division of student affairs (as an entity) to engage in assessment of student learning and development?

- How do this university's student affairs educators perceive and perform their roles in improving student learning and development through assessment efforts?

- How do student affairs educators at this university define the role of assessment of student learning and development in their work?

- What key elements (i.e., knowledge, skills, motivation) contribute to this university's student affairs educators engaging in transformative assessment practices?

- What are this university's necessary components of divisional assessment of student learning and development work?

Past the data collection phase, I stepped away from the primary and ancillary questions, which is appropriate with the emergent methodological nature of qualitative inquiry, when I realized staying with these questions limited the intent and potential of my study, as they are highly technical. I instead refocused my attention on framing the study in nontechnical terms and constraints, and clarified the research question at the heart of my study to not confine my thinking or analysis of the study. Therefore, the

overarching research question that guides my study is: why is assessment not pervasive or consistent practice within student affairs?

Theoretical Perspective

Acknowledging one's theoretical perspective and its implied epistemology in a study is critical because it provides a context for understanding my, the researcher's, approach to asking questions and how, what, and which knowledge and truth claims I make (Crotty, 1998). My worldview on the nature of knowledge production, or epistemology, inevitably affects my approach to how I construct the study and interpret the data. Therefore, I note and acknowledge my epistemology as rooted in social constructionism and my theoretical perspective as centered in interpretivism. Epistemologically I believe "meaning is not discovered, but constructed" (Crotty, 1998, p. 9). As a researcher I do not set out to discover a preexisting answer to my research question but seek meaning and answers through conducting the study. Furthermore, because I come from an interpretivist theoretical perspective, I recognize meaning as socially constructed and brought to consciousness through individual and/or shared meaning (Crotty, 1998). Therefore, my engagement, observation, and discussion with research participants render possible the construction of inferred meaning regarding their actions, beliefs, and activities related to assessment of student learning and development, subsequently leading to my findings. The claims offered in my study summarize the experiences and meaning of assessment of student learning and development at the institution of study, and through reinterpreting my data through Giroux's (1999, 2005, 2014) theorizing of neoliberalism, I am able to expand the site-specific findings to the broader realm of student affairs.

Methodology

A highly descriptive and inclusive methodology, case studies (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995; Yin, 1994, 2003) shed light on a specific aspect or component of a larger picture, like how a culture of assessment of student learning and development is created and sustained in a division of student affairs. While there is not full agreement on case study being a methodology, several predominant researchers (i.e. Merriam, Stake, and Yin) have written on case study methodology since the 1980s (Merriam, 2009). In addition, as an interpretivist study, the case is based on: (a) in-depth exploration of a specific topic, (b) bounded time and activity, (c) variety in data collection methods, and (d) the inquiry occurring over an extended period of time (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995). I address each factor, in turn, to examine what makes Manresa a *good* case for studying this phenomenon.

Case studies provide in-depth description and analysis on a focused complex case for the purpose of learning new information about a program or person at the case level (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Patton, 2002; Stake, 1995), and through reinterpretation of the findings, one gains a greater understanding of the broader phenomenon. Gaining a thorough description and picture of a culture of assessment of student learning and development within a division is a crucial step in understanding the phenomenon and establishing a foundation for the larger topic of education assessment. As stated by Stake (1995), "We study a case when it itself is of very special interest. We look for the detail of interaction with its contexts" (p. xi). The process of interpreting and reinterpreting the data gathered through a case study sheds new light on the phenomenon to foster a great understanding of the case and its components. Case study methodology encourages

specific, focused attention on one aspect of highly complex organizations, which is important for this study because the exploring how a culture of assessment of student learning is built is already a large undertaking without considering other aspects of the organization. A case study allows me to provide a complete portrait of the case, a division of student affairs, by showing how specific aspects of the culture of assessment are contextualized within the division. It is easier to examine and understand a case once the phenomenon is described and analyzed through focused case study research.

In this study I focus on a single unit (a division of student affairs) as the unit of analysis comprising a closed system (Merriam, 1998, 2009). I made this methodological choice for two reasons. First, a single division of student affairs was selected over a multiple or embedded set of cases because, given my time constraints, richer data could be gathered if my time was spent focused on one division instead of dividing my time between several institutions. Second, because there is not agreement in the literature if the motivation or authority for initiating and maintaining assessment processes is held in one position or level within student affairs (Green et al., 2008), I did not want to confine the system to one person or one level in the division (i.e., vice president or department directors). Selecting one person could also not be justified as an exceptional case because he or she would never satisfy the criteria. In summary, concerted time and effort was given to exploring all levels of one division of student affairs, and, in particular, assessment processes to see what critical elements, individuals, or groups of the division emerged as central and significant to how and why staff assess student learning and development.

Sampling for the Case

Clearly established selection criteria guided the case sampling of division of student affairs. In case study research there are typically two levels of sampling, case and within-case (Merriam, 1998, 2009). In this study, case-level criteria narrowed potential cases through qualifications on the type of institution, role of the chief student affairs officer (CSAO), and public assessment practices. Within-case level criteria were not established for this study because I did not want to limit who or what was considered a source of data. The case-level selection criteria were divided between institutional characteristics and specific division of student affairs activities that demonstrate a commitment to building and supporting transformative assessment of student learning and development. In the following section, I justify the case-level criteria used to select a division of student affairs that had strong potential to provide insight into my research question.

Case-Level Sampling: Institutional Characteristics

Before addressing the specific selection criteria of division of student affairs assessment practices, I address the broader limitations or category criteria I incorporated into the selection process. The type of institution, the experience and qualifications of the chief student affairs officer (CSAO), and location of the institution served as the three key category criteria.

Type of institution. First, the list of potential institutions considered had to be comparable in type of institution to minimize the role of non-assessment related factors in selecting the case. For example, there are many differences between a small private college and a large research institution in terms of staff size, focus on mission, degree and

frequency of staff communication, and while these factors are not direct measures of assessment, they influence how the work is done. The key factors for selecting the institution were type, location of student affairs in the organization chart, and assessment practices of the division. The college or university must be at least a bachelor-granting, 4-year institution. The local pressures on 2-year institutions (e.g., community colleges, technical schools) to be adaptable and responsive to the local community were determined to add an additional factor to this study that would further complicate case selection. In addition, 4-year, bachelor-granting institutions have larger divisions of student affairs that allow for individual student affairs educators potentially to have more time to engage in assessment because there are more people to complete the work and staff are not required to oversee as many operations as smaller schools.

As for the position of student affairs within the institution, student affairs divisions typically report directly to the president or chancellor, but at some institutions the division could report to the provost or another member of the president's cabinet. I wanted a division that reported directly to the president in the organizational chart to minimize additional political negotiations that can arise when there is a person between the vice president and the president or chancellor. When the CSAO has direct communication with the president of the institution, he or she can ensure his or her message is accurately communicated, know the precise expectations and reactions of the president, and has greater leverage for obtaining resources. Additionally, if the CSAO did not report to the president, he or she would likely report to the provost. There is often tension between academic and student affairs, especially concerning financial decisions due to the different fund sources for the two areas. Financial hardship occurs at different times

for the two divisions based on how they are funded. Therefore, direct access to the president better ensures the voice and value of student affairs is heard and recognized. The division selected reported directly to the president until the academic year prior to the year this study was conducted, which I did not discover until I was in the field. While this was not ideal, for the reasons listed above, I felt comfortable proceeding because of the level of access and credibility I perceived the CSAO had with the president. Specifically, I looked to the example of the current $100 million university capital campaign for student affairs facilities and programs as a testament to the support and communication shared between the president and CSAO.

Assessment of student learning and development must be conducted at the division and department levels. Based on the definition of successful and high-quality assessment practices, for assessment to be conducted on only one level is not comprehensive enough to make meaning of the student experience and their learning because it is a small snapshot of a larger picture (AAHE, 1992; Bresciani et al., 2004; Earl, 2003; Huba & Freed, 2000; Maki, 2004; NRC, 2001; Wahlberg, 2008). The most thorough understanding of the division's culture of student learning and development will come through examining its members and their collective efforts.

Chief student affairs officer. The second category criterion focused on the CSAO. As noted earlier, leadership of assessment is an important element to success (Green, Jones, & Aloi, 2008). Therefore, three criteria for the CSAO are crucial to selecting a good case. The criteria for the CSAO is he or she must: (a) have held their current position for 5 or more years at their current institution; (b) have a degree in higher education, student personnel administration, college student personnel, or an equivalent

and a terminal degree; and (c) be a member of NASPA and/or ACPA, the two umbrella national professional associations for student affairs. The rationale for these criteria is to gain alignment with common ideas and professional experience about organizational culture, leadership preparation, and the influence professional associations have in supporting and directing CSAOs in their roles.

The CSAO must have 5 or more years in his or her current position because he or she needs to have had ample time to understand the institutional culture and enough time to respond to and navigate assessment and evaluation calls and pressures for the division. At the time I began my field research, the CSAO of the selected division had occupied his position for $3^1/_2$ years. While this is below the initial requirement, he was one of the longest-sitting CSAO for those institutions generated by my institutional-level criteria.

The degree requirements exist to ensure the CSAOs in sample cases have a working knowledge of the student affairs profession through their academic coursework, and potentially some understanding of assessment of student learning and development as a concept and practice. First, higher education academic programs offer courses about the functional areas of student affairs, history of the profession, and student development theory to provide graduates a strong foundation of the profession and its central functions. I wanted the CSAO to be a student affairs content expert because context, experience, and values influence assessment practices, which vary by academic discipline, and I wanted to understand the phenomenon from a traditional student affairs perspective. Second, while advanced or terminal degrees do not equate to being an expert in any aspect of their position (like assessment), the curricular content and assignments required to earn a terminal degree ideally develops the professional's ability to seek,

analyze, and evaluate information or data, which is a key element of assessment practice.

Next, requiring the CSAO to be a NASPA or ACPA member is valuable for two reasons. First, working with a CSAO who is a member of a professional association increases the likelihood he or she is informed, and ideally current, on what is happening within the profession on a national scale because they receive electronic and written communications from the organization on current trends, recent publications, and topical issues of the profession. Membership in an association does not equate to the CSAO being an active member, but it hopefully heightens their awareness of trends and important issues. Second, due to the focus and attention on assessment by professional associations, CSAOs might be more encouraged or feel pressured by professional standards and practices to lead their divisions in this direction than those who do not receive information. Some peer pressure to be current and successful exists in being an association member.

Finally, while not a listed criterion of the study, the willingness of the CSAO to participate in my study is important to note. CSAOs play an important role in initiating and/or sustaining the assessment culture within the division (Aloi et al., 2008; Green et al., 2008; Maki, 2004; Moxley, 1999). CSAOs are responsible for leading or directing their divisions, making it essential to explore how they view and respond to assessment. CSAOs' attitudes and actions directly affect the attitudes and actions of their staff members. Examining CSAOs' attitudes, beliefs, and perceptions about assessment is important to understanding the foundation those activities within divisions of student affairs. The CSAO's interest in participation enables my access to the division, but also suggests his or her commitment to assessment, which is critical for my study.

Location. Finally, to spend an extended amount of time on site observing, participating in meetings, and collecting artifacts/documents, I limited the location of the case to one of NASPA's regions. I do not specify which region was used because it risks the confidentially of the institution. With an eye on the next phase of sampling for the case, narrowing the potential cases to one region of a professional association established one standard by which institution proposals for presentations were measured against.

Case-Level Sampling: Divisional Assessment

Ascertaining if a culture of transformative assessment truly exists and is growing within a division of student affairs from the outside is a challenging task. A measure does not exist to rate or rank divisions of student affairs' assessment effort. However, for the purpose of learning more about divisions engaging in transformative assessment, I needed to create a process for identifying potential cases. The case-level, purposeful sampling (Patton, 2002) criteria are complex, as they define and establish the criteria by which an information-rich case is selected. The following four-step process for selecting the case was built in light of the types of data needed for a rigorous, qualitative research methodology as well as independent measures of effective assessment practice. The four steps include:

1. Collecting and analyzing direct evidence of knowledge contribution to the student affairs profession through conference presentation and articles publishing;

2. Vetting of published assessment practices on university and department websites through the National Institute for Learning Outcome Assessment Transparency Framework;

3. Surveying chief student affairs officers (CSAOs) and analyzing their thoughts and actions related to assessment of student learning and development; and

4. Collecting and tabulating the rankings of the institutions in the previous steps and justifying the selection of the top case.

Each of these steps is described in greater detail as well as their general results throughout this section.

Presentations and publications. The first step in the selection of the division of student affairs was developed to identify divisions of student affairs, in the established states and institutions, that are actively engaged in assessment evidenced through their sharing of assessment-related papers and presentations at regional and national conferences or through publications. Being selected through the peer-review process validates the quality of the work presented, and at minimum recognizes and supports the work. Typically, institutions that have evidence they are doing something well or getting meaningful results attempt to share or showcase their work through professional presentations or publications.

Therefore, I reviewed all ACPA, NASPA, and Jossey-Bass student affairs-based literature published in 2011, and all ACPA and NASPA annual and assessment professional conference presentation schedules as well as the Assessment Institute Conference that took place in 2011. The time range was set to one year to get the most current data and accurate representation of student affairs' direction and value of assessment of student learning and development. In total, I reviewed seven different publications and five conferences to produce a list of 26 institutions that had staff members who published at least one article or presented at least one conference (see

Table 1). Thirteen of the 26 institutions had publications or presentations in at least two

sources, and it was those 13 who proceeded to step two and are highlighted in the table.

Table 1

Potential Cases—Master List

Institution	Number of Presentations & Publications
Alta Vista University	2
Apex College	2
Botanical State University	6
North State University	1
Bell University	1
Lucas University	1
College of Molina	1
College University	1
Dewey University	2
Manresa University	8
Isle University	4
Kirkland University	1
Reginald State University	1
Ivory University	2
Intellect University	3
Hope College	1
East-West University	1
Steel University	1
Legacy University	1
Kewpie University	1
Saw Grass University	2
University of Insight	2
University of Ions	3
University of Madera	3
University of Nobles	2
Goliath College	1

NILOA transparency framework. The National Institute for Learning

Outcomes Assessment (NILOA) Transparency Framework (see Appendix A) is

"intended to help institutions evaluate the extent to which they are making evidence of student accomplishment readily accessible and potentially useful and meaningful to various audiences" (National Institute for Learning Outcomes Assessment, 2011, ¶1). Aligned with its purpose, I used the NILOA Transparency Framework to rate how transparent the institutions identified in step one are in communicating their assessment efforts, based on elements of the framework. Specifically, I reviewed university websites based on the NILOA Transparency Framework because websites are the public face of the institution and division of student affairs. I selected this framework because if institutions prioritize space and language related to assessment on their website—the external face of the institution—it is possible they are making time and space for the conversation and work to happen on campus. At minimum, they want others to believe they are doing what they are promoting in terms of assessment. Either way, they are making a concentrated effort to advance the image of assessment for the institution.

The NILOA Framework was an effective tool for evaluating and scoring sites. For consistency, the central division of student affairs and institution assessment pages served as key starter pages for each site. I utilized a five-click maximum rule to find evidence, meaning an item described in the NILOA Transparency Framework must be found within five-clicks off the key starter pages. The 13 institutions that advanced to this phase were subjected to my thorough review of their websites. I spent significant time reviewing each institution's website—university, divisional, and departmental pages—for evidence or language related to the department's and university's culture of assessment of student learning and development. Divisions were scored on the number of framework items present on their websites. The six frameworks were coded as:

1. Assessment Plans

2. Assessment Resources

3. Current Assessment Activities

4. Evidence of Student Learning

5. Use of Student Learning Evidence

6. Student Learning Outcome Statements

Seven of the institutions had 5 or less points, or references to aspects of the framework, while the other six institutions had 7 to 11 points. The score of each institution based on the NILOA Framework and its cumulative score are represented in Table 2. The top six institutions were placed in contention as potential cases.

CSAO survey. The third step of institutional-level selection criteria occurred simultaneously with the second, focusing on the same 13 institutions identified in step one. I created the survey based on the key principles on quality assessment of student learning and development practices and processes (AAHE, 1992; Bresciani et al., 2004; Earl, 2003; Huba & Freed, 2000; Maki, 2010; National Research Council, 2001; Wehlburg, 2008) to get a more thorough picture of the CSAOs' perceptions of assessment of student learning and development work within their division's of student affairs. The survey addressed items like who was leading and involved in assessment efforts, if an assessment plan existed, if related training was provided, if divisional student learning outcomes exist, the role of students in assessment, and articulation of the greatest priority concerning assessment of student learning and development.

Table 2

NILOA Score Summary

	NILOA Frameworks Reference or Connections Present on Website	Total References or Connections
Alta Vista University	2A, 2C, 2D, 4F	10
Apex College	A, 2B, 2C, D, F	7
Botanical State University	2A, B, C, D, 2E, F	8
Dewey University	A, B, C, 2D, 2E, 4F	11
Manresa University	2A, 2B, D, E, 3F	9
Isle University		0
Ivory University	A, B, E	3
Intellect University	A, B, C	3
Saw Grass University	A, B	2
University of Insight	2B	2
University of Ions	2A, 2B, 2C, 2D, 2F	10
University of Madera	A, B, D, E, F	5
University of Nobles	A, B	2

The CSAOs of the 13 institutions were emailed (see Appendix B) an information-gathering survey (see Appendix C). Those who did not respond within 2 weeks were sent the same email as a reminder. For each CSAO who returned a survey, his or her institution stayed in contention because it demonstrated his or her commitment to assessment and interest in participating in the study. In addition, the survey data provided me a richer picture of the institutions than those who did not complete. The survey results were tabulated, as shown in Table 3, and these institutions were ultimately considered as strong cases for the study.

Table 3

CSAO Survey Responses

	Manresa University	Ivory University	Alta Vista University	Botanical State University	University of Ions
Years CSAO in Position	4	1	0	7	4
Number of Assessment Leaders (groups or individuals)	2	1 (FT)	3	1	1 (FT)
Number of Groups Engaged in Assessment	5	3	6	2	4
Divisional Assessment Plan	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Division Assessment Training	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Divisional Assessment Statements	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
Students Involved in Assessment	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y

Tabulation and selection. Finally, I compiled the individual results of each step to create a collective rationale statement outlining the best case for my study. The rationale addressed philosophical tenets of my methodology, summary of the institutions' results based on each criterion, my commentary on the institutions, and other points of interest gathered through the process that assisted in making the decision. Four divisions of student affairs emerged as strong potential cases and were included in the rationale (see Table 4). Each division published or presented about assessment in at least two publications or conferences and received the top NILOA web review scores. Of the four, all but Dewey University's CSAO returned the information gathering survey. Overall,

Manresa University achieved high marks for the within-case criteria and presented as the best case for the study.

Table 4

Top Four Institution Summary

Institution	Step #1: Presentation & Publication	Step #2: NILOA	Step #3: Survey
Alta Vista University	2 sources (1 per type)	10	Yes
Dewey University	2 sources (1 per type)	11	No
Manresa University	4 sources; 8 total	9	Yes
University of Ions	2 sources, 3 total	10	Yes

Manresa University was in the top three ratings for each step, provided evidence the institution perceived assessment as a clear priority and focus for the division, potential participants communicated desire to improve assessment efforts, and they did not have a fulltime assessment staff member. I wanted to learn how an entire division staff works together to create and maintain a culture of assessment of student learning and development, and having a fulltime assessment professional on staff would significantly alter the dynamic. My dissertation committee unanimously approved Manresa University as the case for this study.

Participation Recruitment

With sampling complete, I was able to proceed with securing the case for my study. I contacted Manresa University's chief student affairs officer (CSAO) via email (see Appendix D) to request his permission to serve as the case for the study. The email request outlined what the study involved in terms of time and access to resources (documents and staff), and greater details about privacy, confidentiality, and authority

were addressed in the attached Informed Consent Form (see Appendix E). Before the CSAO had a chance to respond to the email, we were introduced at a professional conference and he provided verbal agreement to serve as the case for my study. I confirmed his and the division's participation via email through his completion of the Institution/Division Informed Consent and individual staff member Informed Consent/Confidentiality Statement (see Appendix F).

With Manresa officially set as the case, I worked with the CSAO to identify initial data sources, like artifacts, publications, points of observation, and meeting schedules as well as discussed participant recruitment. I first contacted each divisional staff person via email (see Appendix G), to introduce the study and seek his or her involvement in the interviews. The CSAO approved my request to attend divisional assessment committee and assessment council meetings. These two opportunities were my initial setting for observation. My requests and attempts to seek other opportunities to observe assessment in action or organizational culture resulted in additional observation at a 2-day strategic planning retreat. I learned that the semester was focused on individual units writing or re-writing their departmental learning outcomes, which is a challenging process to observe as it is an individual or small group task, but it was a good process to observe. For the department or two that worked on the learning outcomes in a group setting, my schedule would not allow me to make it to campus for the discussions.

In terms of interviews, two rounds of email requests to participate in my study were sent to members of the assessment committee, the vice president's leadership team, and department assistant directors, associate directors, and directors. One email request was sent to all staff members, including the aforementioned groups. The vice president

also encouraged staff members to participate in the study and endorsed a message I sent

to all staff members in their internal weekly divisional listserv to solicit interviews. In

addition, I solicited staff members to do interviews with me at the conclusion of

assessment committee meetings and during the 2-day retreat. The best response to these

solicitations was from members of the assessment committee and after the 2-day strategic

planning retreat. I account the high response after the retreat to staff members being able

to put a face with my solicitation and that summer is a less demanding time on their

schedules so they felt like they had a little time to spare. I interviewed everyone who

displayed any interest in talking with me. For interviews and observations, I provided

copies of the privacy/confidentiality form (see Appendix F) to individual staff members

before we began the meeting or interview to gain their approval for involvement in the

study.

Methods

For this study I employed several methods to gather data, including participant

observations, document analysis, and interviews. Merriam (1998) supports the use of

multiple methods in case study research and adds that, "data collection in a case study is

a recursive, interactive process in which engaging in one strategy incorporates or may

lead to subsequent sources of data" (p. 134). My study was recursive and interactive in

the way the interviews, documents, and observations supported and directed one another

over the course of seven months. Interview questions lead to gathering new documents,

and during meetings I got additional documents and created connections with staff

members to solicit additional interviews. I was also able to use interview and observation

time to get thoughts on documents I collected. Gathering data from the different vantage

points of each method offered me a fuller picture of how a division of student affairs

creates and manages a growing culture of assessing student learning and development.

The review of organizational documents, reports, and websites led to asking new

questions of the staff, and observations of the staff made me analyze interview

transcriptions in different ways, and so on. Directly hearing how student affairs educators

process and verbalize their role and understanding of assessing student learning and

development, watching their actions, and examining their actions as represented in

documents allowed me to create *thick, rich* description (Geertz, 1974; Patton, 2002) for

the study.

During my time in the field, I spent one to 2 days a month on campus during the

school year as a participant observer (Merriam 1998, 2009; Stake, 1995) attending the

monthly Assessment Council and Assessment Committee meetings, conducting

interviews, and observing staff and the campus environment. I was also invited to attend

a 2-day strategic planning retreat with over 40 of the leaders, directors, and associate

directors in the division at the conclusion of the school year. In total, I conducted 19

interviews with members of the vice president's staff, directors, assistant directors, entry-

level staff who represented almost two-thirds of the departments in the division; spent

over 60 hours observing, and collected numerous divisional assessment-related

documents, artifacts, and web-based materials.

Participant Observation

Observation is a critical component of my research plan. Seven months of

observations allowed me to see the day-to-day operations of the division, the interactions

of members of the assessment committee and council, and the opportunity to check

statements and opinions of the staff members gathered in interviews with their public actions and statements. I stayed true to my observation plan (see Appendix H) during my time in the field with one exception. Before I was officially introduced to staff members, I observed interactions of staff and the general life of campus for a couple hours as an onlooker. During this time I scanned the environment and watched how staff members interacted with one another, how students interacted with one another, and how staff and students interacted. I appreciated having this time to see everyone interact without the feeling of being watched or judged. I was concerned the staff would act a different way with me around, but I was pleased to find congruency in how staff interacted when they knew they were being watched and when they did not know I was observing them.

Afterwards, as a participant observer (Merriam, 1998, 2009; Stake, 1995), I attended monthly assessment committee and council meetings during the spring semester and a 2-day staff retreat at the beginning of summer break. I was introduced to the assessment committee and council members at the first meetings of the semester and to other staff members as I interacted with them. After my first meeting with each group, my presence was not discussed or announced again; they treated me as if I were a new staff member joining the group. In minimizing my presence by not reminding everyone at each meeting why I was present, I felt like I belonged and I believe others did as well. I worked to engage in small talk with those in attendance before and after meetings to learn about them and what is happening on campus and in the division. During meetings, I would rarely talk, which is a departure from my typical professional practice, but I did not stand out as other members did not say much. Not talking helped me to focus on listening and watching others.

In contrast to the meetings I attended as a temporary member, I was a non-participant guest at the strategic planning retreat. I benefitted from no public introduction at the 2-day retreat because the staff members that had not met me assumed I was a new staff member, thus I believe my presence had minimal influence on their communication during the retreat. It was only through direct personal interaction that staff learned that I was not a new staff member but instead "the doctoral student looking at assessment." I was, however, able to introduce myself at the end of the retreat to explain my attendance, thank people for their support, and solicit interviews. Based on the positive response of offers to participate in an interview after the retreat, I believe many of the staff members were not bothered or concerned by my attendance.

Entering and exiting the field was an easy and natural process due to the timing. I entered the field at the beginning of the spring semester, and essentially left at its conclusion. While I joined the assessment committee during the middle of the year, attendance by members was not consistent so my attendance did not significantly change the dynamic of the group. And the assessment council's first meeting was my first meeting with them so I was a part of the group dynamic from the beginning. While I could have been clearer about my exiting from the groups at the conclusion of the spring semester, I was not sure at the time if I would join them again. As a whole, my observations proved to be a very useful emergent data source for understanding how the division of student affairs engages in dialogue about assessment practices as it reflects actual practice, not simple statements about their beliefs or practices.

Document Analysis

Examination of divisional assessment documents and artifacts was a critical data source. Investigating how student affairs educators actually engage in assessment practices and communicate their results, as noted in documents and reports, is central to learning what they value in assessing student learning and development. I selected a division that engages in assessment and is willing to share its results and processes, beyond talking about how it could or should be done. Therefore, analysis of documents produced on and related to their assessment work provided relevant data as well as a foundation for approaching interviews and observations. I utilized purposeful intensity sampling to obtain strong, information rich examples of the division's assessment work (Patton, 2002). Several Manresa University published documents came from the vice president at my request for items related to their assessment work, another group came from my review of the Manresa website, and others were gathered throughout my time in the field based on the work that was done through the assessment committee and council and information gained through interviews.

The documents can be grouped into the following categories: divisional goals, mission, and reports; public statements by the university; and individual program or group assessment and evaluation results. Examples of these documents include: (a) annual division of student affairs assessment reports; (b) capital campaign documents highlighting the role of student life; (c) agendas and reports of the division's assessment committee and council; (d) the division's strategic plan; (e) institutional learning statements; (f) institutional values and mission documents; and (g) philosophical statements on the work of the institution and division. In addition, information and

images presented on divisional and departmental websites also served as data. Websites

are often seen as the public face of an entity, making them an important communication

tool to be analyzed. Document analysis provided perspective for how to define and

understand the unique system of the division.

Interviews

Finally, the interviews conducted with the divisional staff provided irreplaceable

access to the thoughts and attitudes of staff members about assessment as well as

thorough description of the activities they engage in and why. At minimum, I wanted

participation from the chief student affairs officer (CSAO), leaders of divisional

assessment efforts, and staff from a variety of departments within the division, but

wanted to hear from as many staff members as possible. All willing participants within

the division were included in the study. Participant criteria were not limited by gender,

race, socioeconomic status, age, or other demographic criteria; participation was simply

based on the criteria of being employed by the division of student affairs. I engaged in

purposive sampling with the intent to interview key constituents involved with the

division's assessment of student learning and development efforts, as well as those who

challenged or are not supportive of the efforts, as a necessary way to uncover what

assessment means to key staff and leadership in the division.

In total, 19 interviews were conducted using my interview protocols (see

Appendix I and J) that represented five administrative levels of the organization: (a) vice

president's staff, (b) directors, (c) assistant/associate directors, (d) coordinators, and (e)

administrative support. I interviewed each of the following individuals once: the CSAO,

four members of the vice president's office/dean of students' office, five directors, four

assistant directors, four coordinators, and one administrative support staff member. These 19 individuals also represent the majority of functional areas in the division. The departments represented include: (a) vice president's office, (b) athletics, (c) campus ministry, (d) campus recreation, (e) student activities/leadership, (f) student conduct, (g) residence life, (h) diversity/multicultural, and (i) wellness. To maintain staff members' confidentiality, I use limited references to position or functional area when presenting data. Associations with position or area are used to offer useful context for direct quotations.

In terms of the organizational chart, all but one of the seven core functional areas had at least one staff member participate in an interview. Campus dining services' staff did not participate in the study, but they are not employees of Manresa nor do they engage in assessment of student learning and development. Additionally, campus dining does not have a representative on the Assessment Committee and were not asked to conduct an assessment project, which confirms their participation in the study is not critical. Therefore, all applicable departments are represented in the study.

Coding and Analysis

Acknowledging that data analysis is an iterative process and that "[data] collection and analysis should be a simultaneous process" (Merriam, 1998, p. 155) are important to note in a qualitative study, but it does not mean structures and processes should not be established and outlined in advance. Strauss and Corbin (1998) note the delicate work of analysis; "analysis is the interplay between researchers and data. It's both science and art" (p. 13). However, the rigor of qualitative research comes from "the researcher's presence, the nature of the interaction between researcher and participants, the triangulation of data, the interpretation of perceptions, and rich, thick description"

(Merriam, 1998, p. 151). How I managed each of these items through data analysis is discussed in this section.

I gathered data over the course of 7 months, and data were formatively analyzed throughout that time and summative data analysis began upon completion of my fieldwork. Staying focused on my research question was challenging at times as a participant observer because I would forget that I was not a staff member at Manresa as their work is similar to mine. However, my familiarity with student affairs and assessment assisted in navigating my fieldwork, coding, and analysis. My familiarity with student affairs work and the welcoming environment of Manresa's division of student affairs as well as staffing changes in the division helped me exit the field. By the last couple interviews I conducted, I could anticipate the responses to specific questions, like those related to what was and was not happening in the division of student affairs regarding assessment of student learning and development. More importantly, my time in the field ended because a fulltime director of assessment was hired for the division of student affairs and was set to fill the position the first of August. The presence of this new employee would change the dynamics of the bounded system and significantly alter the perceived and actual culture of assessment in the division of student affairs. The division's culture was built on a decentralized approach to assessing student learning and development and the change of the division's organization chart would shift it to be more centralized. Therefore, for these reason, I ended my time in the field shortly before the new director of assessment began in the position.

In addition to collecting and coding documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations, I created theoretical memos and field notes to document my thoughts and

observations on the data and process. These documents assisted in building working

categories and themes that narrowed, focused, and improved collection and analysis of

data. Glaser and Strauss (1967) noted the significance and value of writing theoretical

memos and notes during a study, specifically during data coding. While this study is a

case study and not grounded theory, the use of theoretical memos assisted me in

documenting and conceptualizing my thoughts as I analyzed the data. The process helped

me to separate codes and themes as a data analysis step from interpreting the codes and

themes as findings. The process also aided in the evolution of codes and themes. There

were so many ways to look at the data that the memos helped me to capture ideas about

the data and the relationship between data.

I employed the constant comparative method of analysis throughout. The core of

this method is the active and constant interplay of data; each source of data is compared

to other sources to discover categories and themes (Glaser, 1978; Glaser & Strauss, 1967;

Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998). While I began this study with an established

research question, a philosophy of method, and selected methods, as an interpretivist

qualitative researcher, I was open to where the data led for collection and analysis

(Crotty, 1998; Merriam, 1998, 2009). Analysis of the data happened in the new levels of

coding, "identifying information about the data and interpretive constructs related to

analysis" (Merriam, 1998, p. 164). Each data source was reviewed and coded to describe

the type of information present. Over time, the codes were analyzed for categories, and

then into themes. Based on this process, three central themes emerged that describe how

Manresa University's division of student affairs is grappling with conflicting approaches

and values of assessment. Finally, once the themes were identified they were analyzed

and reinterpreted through Giroux' (1999, 2005, 2014) conceptual framework of

neoliberalism. This final step of analyzing the meaning that emerged through the data in

light of a conceptual framework resulted in the findings, implications, and

recommendations of the study.

Biases and Subjectivities

Who I am as a person and a professional is a wonderful mix of my parents'

strengths. My parents raised four hardworking and happy children. My mother quickly

learned after her second child was born that parenting was a constant learning process;

the tactics and approaches she used with me as the first-born did not work on my sisters

or brother. She figured how to teach and support each of us differently, as we all tested,

explored, and learned in unique ways. However, one universal tactic she used was to

teach us to question what we saw, read, and heard instead of simply believing and

agreeing with any and every thing. She wanted us to own and defend our beliefs and act

accordingly. In addition, in her professional career as a nurse and now a nurse educator,

my mother has enjoyed the teaching and helping components of her job the most. My

mother's learning is based in necessity and efficiency, while my father is the

quintessential lifelong learner who continually reads, explores, and tries new things. He

also has a bit of an artistic and creative side that he balances with his logical, analytical

professional role as an accountant. My father continuously reads the newspaper for

fascinating items and topics of interest; he enjoys amassing knowledge for knowledge's

sake and to try new things. As an example, I do not know of another Caucasian family in

Minnesota that made tempura and paella on a regular basis. My father taught us to see

things beyond the ordinary. His parenting style is role modeling; he shows us it is okay to

try new things and supports us in all our endeavors. What I learned from watching these two approaches to life has greatly affected who I am as a person and how I understand the world.

I highly value learning, especially when it feels easy and enjoyable, because it is catered to the learner's interests or style. I also value efficiency, but desire for it to not feel mechanical or stifling. More broadly speaking, while I believe meaning and learning can be derived from books and data, both are made greater or stronger through discussion and meaning-making activities. Therefore, I ask questions and try not to assume, and be mindful of others' perspectives and intentions in order to make sense of what is happening around me.

In the context of my professional views and beliefs, I seek to strike a balance between the science (mother's influence) and art (father's influence) of assessment of student learning and development. When the systems, structures, resources, and trainings educators create and maintain address the true intent of assessment—improving student learning—the work feels more purposeful and valuable. Assess in Latin is *assidere*, which means to sit beside; this definition and image resonates with how I view assessment. Assessment is individualized, specialized, and focused on growth. Regarding the science of assessment, students should benefit from the expansive amount of knowledge and research on teaching and learning throughout their educational career. When assessment is part of program and activity planning within education from the onset, the students and their learning will be the focus and improvement of the programs/activities will foster learning, which can entail improved teaching practices. In terms of the art of assessment, I work in student affairs because of the great learning

experiences it offered me as an undergraduate. My involvement experiences provided me with exciting learning opportunities with structured time for reflection and feedback from my advisors and mentors. I can almost guarantee some of my advisors had no knowledge of assessment practices, but they artfully utilized the key concepts in their work. I desire to provide similar types of quality experiences for my students, and for assessment of student learning and development to be central in my work.

I began conducting assessment and evaluation in 2005, but my initial exposure to it was in 2000 when I served on a Council for the Advancement of Standards (CAS) review team. I was fascinated by the CAS process and enjoyed being able to critically examine my functional area, campus activities. In hindsight I realize I was just going through the motions and not seeing the bigger picture. Yet it did not take long for my mind and eye on improvement, efficiency, and effectiveness to develop me as an intentional and thoughtful student affairs educator who believed in the purpose and role of assessment of student learning and development in our work. With the support and vision of my mentor, who first inspired me to look at assessment and program evaluation more deeply, I was a member of a small team who led our department through a homegrown program evaluation process. I was hooked. From the reading we did to learn about how to create our process to creating the review forms to discussing the purpose and goals of my colleagues work with them, the philosophy of assessment and evaluation redefined (and perhaps refined) who I was as a student affairs educator. The focus of my work was always on the students, but this experience allowed me to see how I could more actively and effectively play a role in their growth and development.

A few years after this project, I had the great fortune to take two of my doctoral classes on the topic of assessment within higher education. These courses provided me with theoretical frameworks and tools for how better to approach the work, and, more importantly, a richer understanding of the topic and its role in education. After completing the courses, I was given the opportunity to co-teach the first of the two courses. I credit the professor of these courses with opening me up to the world of assessment and evaluation. She has a unique perspective on the topics and years of expansive work in examining and engaging in assessment and program evaluation. She helped me to see how encompassing, broad, important, theoretical, and complicated assessment truly is, but more importantly how pivotal it is to the future of (higher) education. In theory assessment is beautiful, but its beauty in practice has yet to be fully seen as those who must conduct it do not generally have the will or knowledge needed.

In my professional role as a director of an office, I see how others view assessment as complex, overwhelming, and unnecessary. At times, I too am overwhelmed and confused by what to do and how to do it. Assessment of student learning and development and program evaluation work is neither easy nor clear, and rarely are there clear answers or ways. It takes time, patience, and dedication to integrate assessment processes into practice. Assessment of student learning and development is not just about surveys, forms, and reports; it is about determining if students are learning in the most effective way. To fully engage in transformative assessment of student learning and development, educators cannot simply commit to surveying students at the end of the program, they must integrate assessment and learning philosophies into who

they are as a professional and how they work with others to create a culture that values

the work.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Inside Manresa, pressure mounts to satisfy both external accountability and internal commitments to improvement of student experience and performance. Paralleling the larger conversation surrounding assessment in higher education, two opposing schools of thought on the role and value of assessment are evidenced among Manresa University's student affairs staff members. Whereas accountability has been seen as an element of assessment of student learning and development, accountability's purpose and practices in fact exist in direct opposition to the philosophy and practice of assessment. As a result of analyzing my data through theoretical concepts of neoliberalism, I argue distinguishing accountability from assessment rhetoric and practice is both necessary and vital to preserving the core value of democracy in higher education and to fulfilling student affairs' mission. My analysis of case study data challenges dominant accountability rhetoric in higher education, leading me purposefully to untangle and separate out accountability from assessment, specifically assessment of student learning and development. Current "assessment" practices do not reflect the democratic ideals of higher education because of the influence of the neoliberal economy. In this chapter, I: (a) define neoliberalism and contextualize the neoliberal economic enterprise's effects on higher education; (b) define the theoretical concepts rooted in theory on the neoliberal economy that together make up my study's theoretical frame and through which I analyze

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my data; (c) present my analysis of data in three themes—Jesuit institution and values, excellence, and resistance; and (d) reinterpret each theme through theoretical concepts associated with neoliberalism.

Manresa University

Manresa University is a pseudonym for the university selected as the case for this study. Pseudonyms are used for the name of the institution and staff members to protect the confidentiality of those involved in the research. According to Carnegie Classifications, Manresa University is a residential, 4-year, private research university located in a large city. In addition, Manresa is a large Jesuit, Catholic university. The division of student development is large and includes 14 departments, which focus on: athletics, campus ministry, campus recreation, community service, off-campus student life, residence life, residential learning communities, student activities, Greek affairs, student conduct, multicultural affairs, student leadership development, student and welcome centers, and wellness. In addition, dining services reports through the division of student development, but they are a hired contractor that operates independent the university. Throughout, I refer to the division of student development as the division of student affairs. The reasons for using this terminology are to minimize confusion in reading (i.e., division of student *development* assessing student learning and *development*) and to be consistent with student affairs professional organizations' vernacular.

Neoliberalism

One of the greatest strengths of the neoliberal agenda and economy is the ability to disguise its work as maintaining the notion of an American meritocracy and

democracy amidst significant changes and challenges to the political, economic, and global structures that systematically dismantle these ideals.

> Underlying all such discussion is the assumption that our citizens are in the same large boat, called the national economy. There are different levels of income within the boat, of course (some citizens enjoy spacious staterooms while others crowd into steerage). Yet all of us are lifted and propelled along together. The poorest and the wealthiest and everyone in between enjoy the benefits of a national economy that is buoyant, and we all suffer the consequences of an economy in the doldrums. (Reich, 1991, p. 4)

The people, politicians, and corporations who drive the neoliberal economic enterprise benefit from nations' and their citizens' persistent, yet erroneous, belief a team-oriented economy, like that described by Reich (1991), continues in spite of the dominance of the neoliberal, market-driven economy. These beliefs persist even though the U.S. economy has shifted away from a capitalistic, free-market economy toward a new economic structure: a neoliberal economy. Reich's (1991) metaphor extends to each nation's boat sailing in the same sea, needing to navigate around, trade with, and compete with other boats to "win." This set of beliefs about the nature of the U.S. and global economies provides U.S. citizens with the comfort and support of knowing they are not alone and hope that, together, things will be better.

Neoliberalism is centered on "the market [functioning as] the organizing principle for all political, social, and economic decisions." The neoliberal economic enterprise "wages an incessant attack on democracy, public goods, and non-commodified values" (Giroux, 2005, p. 2) in order economically to benefit corporations and the growing U.S. oligarchy. At its most powerful and malicious, neoliberalism operates in the shadows, so as not to draw attention to its controversial, anti-democratic, anti-meritocratic goals, which are to convert societies and communities to markets and people into nothing more

than individual consumers of the market's products (Giroux, 1999, 2005; Reich, 1991). In

the neoliberal economy, corporations' desires and needs drive the world and the

interactions of those in it. Ultimately, the bottom line of the neoliberal economic

enterprise *is* the bottom line, and the only value of people comes from their ability to

contribute as consumers in this new market economy.

> Reformulating social issues as strictly individual or economic, corporate culture functions largely to cancel out the democratic impulses and practices of civil society by either devaluing them or absorbing such impulses within a market logic. No longer a space for political struggle, culture in the corporate model becomes an all-encompassing horizon for producing market identities, values, and practices. (Giroux, 1999, pp. 148-149)

In an economy in which each nation's assets are the skills and contributions of its citizens

to the economy (Reich, 1991), higher education is positioned as a resource and benefit to

nations and their citizens capable of expanding the depth and breadth of citizens'

knowledge and skills. Yet, needed skills and knowledge depends on who demands them.

As corporations' voices trump community, democratic, and higher education voices,

higher education's skill set shifts from critical, moral thinking to the ability to perform

specific tasks. Thus, we see an anti-intellectual shift in education, from liberal arts to

trade schools as well as increased focus on a never-ending parade of professional

certificates and credentials for employees to obtain specific skills or knowledge designed

to fit specific corporate desires.

In the neoliberal economy, democracy is under attack (as are democracy's tenets

of voting rights, the right to organize trade unions and negotiate with corporations,

freedom of speech, and more). Within higher education, the role of a college education

(particularly a liberal arts education) in maintaining, enhancing, and growing democracy

is also under siege. And yet, more specifically, the student affairs profession is at risk of

devolving or becoming extinct if the neoliberal economy succeeds in further skewing the

role of higher education toward corporate wants. As stated in *The Student Personnel*

Point of View, 1949, student affairs work is the antithesis of neoliberalism as:

> The student personnel point of view encompasses the student as a whole. The concept of education is broadened to include attention to the student's well-rounded development—physically, socially, emotionally, and spiritually—as well as intellectually. The student is thought of as responsible participant in his own development and not as passive recipient of an imprinted economic, political, or religious doctrine, or vocation skill. As a responsible participant in the societal processes of our American democracy, his full and balanced maturity is viewed as major end-goal of education and, as well, a necessary means to the fullest development of his fellow citizens. (pp. 17-18)

Critical exploration and analysis of current student affairs policies and practices in order

to determine influences of neoliberalism are critical to shedding light on the underlining

or hidden motives of educational change in the U.S. Specifically, in this study I analyze

assessment of student learning and development as a vehicle that communicates and

prioritizes functions of higher education. The key concepts which make up my theoretical

frame are: (a) privatized public space (Giroux, 2005); (b) corporate culture (Giroux,

1999); (c) autonomous agents (Weis, 2004); (d) blame (Giroux, 1999); and (e) religious

faith: silencer of dissension (Giroux, 2005).

Privatized Public Space

A traditional hallmark of U.S. higher education is its commitment to maintaining

and supporting a democratic state. In a neoliberal economy, democracy is presented as

the goal when in reality it is the proverbial veil that covers the accumulating power of

corporations, who, if left unchallenged, will convert our democracy to a market-dictated

society. Privatizing public space is a tactic used in the neoliberal economy to convert

U.S. citizens from thinking about the good of all instead to think about what is good for one as an individual consumer (Giroux, 2014).

The corporate culture of the neoliberal economy is slowly dismantling and encroaching on the principles of democracy (Giroux, 1999). How can this be when colleges and universities are publically touting and internally allocating resources to efforts that display commitment and affinity to democracy as well as many of their staff believe they are working diligently to promote and engage students in meaningful civic engagement experiences and learning that focus on democracy and its role in supporting the collective good of society? The messages of corporations directed at higher education appear logical and to be in the best interest of students; they promote having a college degree as success, especially in the job market. Higher education appreciates the support of corporations and industry in promoting the value and need of a college education. In turn, when corporations articulate the most valuable skills, experiences, or talents they look for in employees, educators respond with a desire to help students develop the listed skills in their students so they will get hired and be financially successful. The head of the hiring department at Google, Laszlo Bock, recognizes the value of an informed citizenry developed and supported by college graduates but is focused on finding future employees who demonstrate the ability to learn, lead, be humble, and take ownership with expertise (Friedman, 2014). It is hard to argue any item on this list is neither valuable nor out-of-line with the mission of higher education, but from a critical perspective the list includes traits that encourage individual thriving over group or communities as well as for individuals to be pliable and adaptable to the needs of employers. So while Google says it wants leaders who can take ownership, it apparently also wants to be able to direct how,

where, and why it happens. Therefore, colleges and universities talk about the value of democracy but ultimately spend time and resources preparing their students to bring success to corporations. It is not clear how aware members of the higher education community are of these divided and distinct functions and the bait-and-switch that happens when the more altruistic, democracy-like language is used to describe higher education when pleasing corporations and increasing their profits is the bottom line, but it happens and is an issue that challenges higher education and assessment.

Further, educators, specifically student affairs educators, utilize these lists in good faith to direct the programs they offer students so they can promote a program as potentially important, in one or many ways. As an example, student affairs educators strive to say their programs: (a) help students in the "real world"; (b) supplement curricular learning; (c) achieve "needed" skill development for improving society; and (d) increase the "success" of graduates in obtaining jobs, which improves the feeling graduates have towards their college or university and its resulting debt. Strong graduate placement rates make a university look good to students and families who are increasingly cast as "consumers," and strengthen the affinity and feeling that higher education was worth the cost among alumni and their families (both of whom are potential future donors). Ultimately, it is hard to argue with any piece of this example as the argument and its benefits all appear logical and rational. However, with each step away from the democratic mission of higher education, corporations are allowed increasingly to direct the purpose and learning within institutions of higher learning, replacing critical thinking, liberal arts, democratic ideals, and moral/ethical development embedded in the college experience with development of simple skills and knowledge

needed to bolster corporations' bottom line. As a result, "Civic engagement now appears impotent as corporations privatize public space and disconnect power from issues of equity, social justice, and civic responsibility" (Giroux, 2005, pp. 5-6). This entire process is how the neoliberal economy privatizes public space.

Corporate Culture

Corporations, oligarchs, and politicians are drivers of the neoliberal economy. Corporate culture is defined as "an ensemble of ideological and institutional forces that function politically and pedagogically both to govern organizational life through senior managerial control and to produce compliant workers, depoliticized consumers, and passive citizens" (Giroux, 1999, p. 148). Corporations, well-financed, post-*Citizens United* campaign contributors, and well-placed politicians indebted to corporations now seek to streamline higher education into a customer-service organization serving corporations, churning out workers (not innovators) whose skill sets match the corporations' needs, and no more. It is assumed by higher education and others that corporations look to higher education for its leaders and managers, those who will continue to drive up profits, instead of laborers who operate as a cog in the wheel to produce routine tasks or products and then consume those products. Future oligarchs are obtaining degrees from the few executive elite institutions that truly prepare the next generation of leaders and managers who will rule corporations, while laborers and mid-level managers needed by corporations come from middle-class and affluent professional schools (Anyon, 1980). In addition to minimizing the potential and role of college graduates in society to be compliant workers who are not independent, critical thinkers, corporate culture is less concerned with morals and ethics and wants its employees to be

as well. "Markets don't reward moral behavior, and as corporate culture begins to dominate public life it becomes more difficult for citizens to think critically and act morally" (Giroux, 1999, p. 150). Ultimately, corporate culture thrives on citizens and employees who have been conditioned to do what they are told without question and to follow rather than lead. Only those who attend elite institutions are taught to develop the analytical and theoretical capacity and ability to challenge conventions of education to learn how and why they exist, not to memorize answer, reproduce procedures, or prepare for well-defined career roles as is more common in more modest venues (Anyon, 1980). However, the morals and values developed in the elite school students are such that they will not contradict or challenge those set by the neoliberal economy; the students are taught how to maintain their wealth and power, not advance society.

Autonomous Agents

Another goal and outcome of neoliberalism is converting citizens into autonomous agents. Perhaps to balance out the unspoken compliance model of the corporate culture, the neoliberal economy needs individuals to feel they have control over something so they do not attempt to control other aspects of society. Thus people are encouraged to operate, however narrowly, as their own agents, looking out for themselves, only themselves and actively competing against other autonomous agents for their "fair" share. As autonomous agents, individuals are dehumanized to be cogs or pawns in corporations' quest for domination. Individuals become nothing more than consumers. Neoliberalism is concerned with "promoting the virtues of an unbridled individualism almost pathological in its disdain for community, social responsibility, public values, and the public good" (Giroux, 2014, p. 2). As such, "individuals are

unmoored from community, and operate as autonomous agents responsible for their own lives" (Weis, 2004, p. 172).

As autonomous agents, individual value and worth are dictated solely by economic value and worth. The neoliberal economy benefits from individuals who are highly concerned with their earning and by extension purchasing potential that they prolong the amount of time before "settling down" with a partner or having a family, both which limit workforce mobility and are seen as undesirable in the neoliberal economy (Weis, 2004). Amazingly, personal decisions about love and family are controlled through the neoliberal economy. This system is especially hard on young adults because they feel "the weight of an economic and political system that no longer sees them as a social investment for the future" (Giroux, 2005, p. 7). The burden of managing the world on one's own is overwhelming for youth, and honestly everyone, and has significant repercussions on the personal stamina and well-being, quality of life, and health (physically, financially, politically, and emotionally) of our nation. Furthermore, in a world of independent agents, "social problems are reduced to individual flaws and political considerations collapse into the injurious and self-indicting discourse of character" (Giroux, 2014, p. 2). In the neoliberal economy, people are (de)valued by their financial contribution to the economy as well as hold individual fault for social problems and systems of privilege.

Blame

As a tool of deflection, blame is used in the neoliberal economy to hold individuals accountable as autonomous agents and consumers as well as emotionally to control individuals. Blame is further used as a way to manipulate people and messages to

protect corporations from responsibility of their actions. Accountability, in the neoliberal discourse, is all about blame: blame that always gets placed on individual failure, not systemic failure. This is not only unethical, but violates the tenets of democracy, which is founded upon the belief that by helping others succeed, by lifting up others, we all succeed, a collectivist notion that is lost in the individualistic, competitive neoliberal system. Similar to emotional control in abusive relationships, as seen in Stockholm syndrome, when the abuser convinces the abused they asked for or deserved what happened and the abused defend the abuser, when individuals fail in the neoliberal economy, the burden and responsibility of his or her failure lies on him or her alone when there are significant systems of oppression dictating who wins and losses. The neoliberal economic enterprise serves not only to maintain the trope that individuals are people of minimal worth, but also constructs citizens as individuals who feel they have little hope to change things. In terms of protecting corporations, "Given the narrow nature of corporate concerns, it is not surprising that when matters of accountability become part of the language of school reform, they are divorced from broader considerations of ethics, equity, and justice" (Giroux, 1999, p. 153). In the neoliberal economy, schools do not fail because of narrow-sighted, impossible national standards, incessant testing, and lack of funding, to name a few, but because individual students are not smart enough or individual teachers are not highly qualified and do not teach well. Blaming systemic failures on individuals allows other functions of the neoliberal economy to persist and strengthen and challenges or erodes citizens' sense of autonomy and education's possibility to be transformative.

Religious Faith: Silencer of Dissension

In neoliberalism, if individual voices of concern or opposition to neoliberal beliefs or practices take hold with individuals (or groups) and cannot be rationalized through common sense or law of nature, religious faith is invoked to silence dissension (Giroux, 2005). In the current U.S. sociopolitical climate, religion and religious faith are powerful forces with which to reckon. It is extremely difficult, especially for people of faith, to fight against information or actions presented as religiously right, or correct.

> Society is no longer defended as a space in which to nurture the most fundamental values and relations necessary to a democracy but has been recast as an ideological and political sphere "where religious fundamentalism comes together with market fundamentalism to form the ideology of American supremacy." (Soros quoted in Giroux, 2005, p. 10)

By leveraging religious ideologies in market-driven economics, neoliberals feed into the American rhetoric and desire of dominance and supremacy and twist dissension as the cause or effect of maintaining American supremacy. The irony is that tenets of religious faith are often in direct opposition to neoliberalism. Similar to democracy, many religious ideologies value community, equity, and sharing of wealth and talents, to name a few democratic principles. Somehow, neoliberalists have established a structure and discourse that always allows the selfish, self-serving, and narcissistic side, regardless of degree, to trump…everything, which facilitates the growth of the neoliberal economy on moral grounds. Without getting into the effects of neoliberalism on religious faith, neoliberalists have managed to separate tenants of the faith from the faith and have replaced them with neoliberal values and issues of the "right." This theoretical concept is important to my analysis because of the religious affiliation of the case, not necessarily because assess-ment is associated with faith. Assessment is, however, always associated with values.

Analysis

Due to a limited understanding of and experience with assessment in the discipline of student affairs, student affairs educators conflate and confuse assessment terminology and definitions. This confusion is evidenced at Manresa University as staff members use assessment, evaluation, and accountability interchangeably. They also talk of assessment as a distant or philosophical activity. Their practice breeds confusion and is symptomatic of deeper issues that yield poor assessment practices. More importantly, the more concerning issue is this conflation of terms allows the accountability rhetoric and philosophy to infiltrate assessment rhetoric and practice. Accountability is a primary force for student affairs educators to engage in assessment and evaluation practices (Keeling et al., 2008), not because they want to respond to the external agencies or constituents but because of the fear of consequences, perceived and actual, that come with not responding. In reality, accountability has nothing to do with student learning and assessment and everything to do with those external to higher education demanding higher education benefit the economic enterprise, to the full detriment of student learning, by acting like a business and treating students and individuals alike, as consumers (Giroux, 1999).

Assessment of student learning (and development) exists to understand and subsequently improve student learning, which is centered on developing students as life-long learners, active citizens, content or discipline experts, and leaders who can engage in a global society. As such, assessment of student learning is an intentionally specific, guided, values-based, and personalized process in which the learner, or student, is the focus and reason for the effort. By comparison, accountability is the umbrella term for

mandated evaluation of institutions based on externally created national standards, performance objectives, and other systems of measurement that quantify aspects of higher education (Wehlburg, 2008). Assessment honors and advances student learning while accountability exists to standardize the diverse learning environment of higher education. As argued previously, the neoliberal economy's corporate-focused forces profit from the perception that accountability is a valuable or required element of the greater assessment conversation, but when this happens students, student affairs, higher education, and democracy loses. For example, the decades-long friendship between members of the Bush family and the McGraw family, one of the top U.S. textbook publishing and testing companies, played a significant role in the status and structure of the U.S. education system. Because of their connection and association, the strong and long influence of the McGraw family is revealed in George W. Bush's political decisions about education. Bush's education reform reflects a preference for particular testing and special McGraw-published textbooks, ultimately significantly increasing McGraw's profits and securing the use of their textbooks in Texas for years to come (Metcalf, 2008). Bush's *No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act* continues to have major effects on textbook companies and their profits. As seen in how McGraw-Hill produces and scores NCLB-approved evaluation instruments used nationwide (in this unfunded mandate states must pick up the tab for).

In the course of analysis of my case-driven, higher education-situated example, I describe and evidence how accountability is linked to neoliberal ideals and why accountability is detrimental not only to assessment of student learning and development, but to the achievement of higher education's ultimate purpose: the democratic ideal. In

the subsequent sections, I present my initial analysis in three themes—(a) Jesuit

Institutional Values, (b) Excellence, and (c) Resistance—and within each theme I utilize

the neoliberal theoretical concepts previously presented to further analyze each theme's

data. It is through analyzing the themes in the context of neoliberalism that illustrates

how current views and practices of student affairs (and likely all higher education)

assessment are not aligned with the values espoused by their institutions, specifically

democracy. Further, my analysis using social theory allows my findings to extend beyond

my case and become relevant to other divisions of student affairs.

Jesuit Institution and Values

Manresa's clarity and focus on its institutional mission and values are truly

impressive. Manresa University's mission and values are core to the operations of the

institution and the division of student affairs. Students and the value of community are

primary reasons for the recent $100 million capital campaign for projects on Manresa's

main campus. It is standard for students to be noted as the primary beneficiaries of a

university capital campaign, but it is rare for the entirety of a $100 million campaign to

focus on space managed by student affairs, the area that builds community on campuses.

The campaign is a testament to Manresa's dedication to students as well as the value of

student affairs within the mission of the institution. The following statement from the

campaign's webpage outlines the value of community and other important aspects of the

Manresa mission.

> While lessons learned in the classroom are the core of Manresa's academic
> mission, lessons learned on quads, on courts, and over cups of coffee are no less
> critical. It is during these times, outside the classroom, that students transform a
> campus into a community.

> Some of the skills we learn during this unstructured time are the ones that will serve us best in our work and personal lives. Being a member of a student organization can teach us leadership, playing on a team teaches us cooperation and discipline, and that precious time when we can just relax is the time which lifelong bonds of friendship are created. (university website, 5/28/13)

Evidenced by how Manresa spends its money, Manresa's leadership recognizes its mission and values live within all aspects of campus life. Further, in student affairs, the staff developed *The Student Promise* statement to educate students on the promises they make to themselves, others, and the community that honor Jesuit principles. This Promise supplements the student code of conduct by offering students, from a perspective of values, how students of Manresa should conduct themselves at all times. The capital campaign and Student Promise are two of numerous examples of how I saw Manresa staff members work to achieve the mission of the institution.

In 1992, the American Association for Higher Education established educational values as a foundational element of good assessment practices, and subsequent literature, notably Astin and Antonio (2012), affirms educational values are critical to assessment's success. There is great potential for values-driven assessment of student learning and development within divisions of student affairs because of their strongly mission-based culture, yet strong pressure to conduct a certain type of assessment as well as how it should be implemented can stifle or overtake a values-driven assessment process. In the first section, to establish the propensity for values-driven assessment at Manresa, I address: (a) the institution mission, foundation, and values of Manresa that serve as a solid foundation university practices; (b) the use of reflection-as-assessment by several staff members; and (c) how the staff initiated an Examen as Assessment session as a bridge between Jesuit practices and assessment. Then, I address what is absent from and

contradicts the values-driven assessment potential in Manresa's division of student affairs and what each of these examples means both to Manresa and to student affairs divisions in higher education as a whole.

Foundation of university's mission. Manresa University's mission, vision, and identity are core to the operations of the institution. These statements are more than words on pages and websites, they are central to the life of the institution and its staff. Manresa's mission statement is: "We are [city's] Jesuit Catholic University—a diverse community seeking God in all things and working to expand knowledge in the service of humanity through learning, justice and faith" (university website, 5/28/13). Through campus ministry, Manresa offers numerous programs and retreats for students to focus on specific topics (i.e., leadership, community service, social justice, sustainability) that align with Jesuit education while also deepening their understanding and commitment to Jesuit traditions and values. While these types of experiences are expected in campus ministry, other departments like residential life and multicultural affairs also offer meaningful learning experiences for students centered on justice and faith, from social-justice themed living communities to mentorship programs for first-generation students.

The university's promise—*Preparing People to Lead Extraordinary Lives*—also reflects a commitment to those it reaches, which is further supported by the institutional vision:

> Manresa University is the school of choice for those who wish to seek new knowledge in the service of humanity in a world-renowned urban center as members of a diverse learning community that values freedom of inquiry, the pursuit of truth and care for others. (university website, 5/28/13)

Perhaps a surprising example of how the promise and vision is realized on campus is in

Athletics. Coach Allen shares,

> I think the biggest thing is seeing the student athletes go through the process over the 4 years. They come in as freshmen, and they're very naïve about a lot of things whether it's [sport] or life or academics. Just to see them mature over the 4 years and our role in that as coaches and mentors. … If we're doing a good job along the way, they're going to be successful in whatever they do. And like our senior group right now, we were only with them 2 years. But just to see the growth they had in that 2 years, we've been here as a staff. And I think right now, currently, seven of the eight seniors have jobs already waiting for them after graduation.
> And it's just part of kind of the culture we created. You're going to be accountable, and you're going to have to step up and take care of yourself and be a respectful member of the program. And they take that outside the program, and it really helps them.

In a department of higher education not necessarily known for its attention to the

development of scholars, leaders, and stewards of ethical values, Coach Allen displays a

care and commitment to his players that honors the vision and values of Manresa as well

as establishes clear expectations for how his student athletes act, serve, compete, and

grow.

Finally, the *Five Characteristics of a Jesuit Education* at Manresa define the type

and quality of education it is committed to:

- Commitment to excellence: Applying well-learned lessons and skills to achieve new ideas, better solutions and vital answers;
- Faith in God and the religious experience: Promoting well-formed and strongly held beliefs in one's faith tradition to deepen others' relationships with God;
- Service that promotes justice: Using learning and leadership in openhanded and generous ways to ensure freedom of inquiry, the pursuit of truth and care for others;
- Values-based leadership: Ensuring a consistent focus on personal integrity, ethical behavior in business and in all professions, and the appropriate balance between justice and fairness; and
- Global awareness: Demonstrating an understanding that the world's people and societies are interrelated and interdependent. (university website, 5/28/13)

Each of these statements, and their collective message, are the foundation of how

Manresa lives and operates. As evidenced by the examples offered as well as the way

staff members describe their work: not as work but a fulfillment of a greater purpose. Jim

says, "I really believe that we're about forming the future leaders of society. I strongly

believe that at Manresa and at all Jesuit institutions that we're in the process of forming

future leaders of society." The mission and commitment of Manresa's staff members are

not limited to the years students are on campus, they understand their work with students

to serve a greater purpose of influencing and improving society. And Rose acknowledges

the power student affairs educators have in helping students navigate the challenges and

joys of today in preparation for the greater experiences they will encounter in the future

when she shares:

> And we are there with students at some of the most difficult parts of their lives
> where there have been deaths of their friends or in their families, very, very
> serious illnesses. And those are very, very privileged moments when we come
> into students' lives. And we also get to celebrate their hopes and joys with them.
> And one of our particular works is trying to help students understand their gifts
> and skills and abilities as coming from God and helping them to discern how they
> might best use those not to get a great job but our end that we are trying to order
> those so that it's a service in humanity.

From these belief statements and examples of them in practice, it is clear the Manresa

staff is committed to learning, justice, faith, and working for the benefit of others.

More than words. Staff members consistently return to Manresa's value

statements, using them as touchstones in the work they do and the decisions they make.

The integral use of Manresa's mission is a testament to the pervasiveness of the mission

and values of the institution, which is internalized and personal to members of the

division of student affairs. When a mission—one's reason for working and how to

perform that work—is this clear and alive among members of an organization, this represents a solid foundation in which values-driven assessment should thrive and assist staff members in accomplishing the institution's mission, but the connection between assessment of student learning and development as a vehicle for honoring and maintaining the mission needs to be forged.

From the banners, flyers, and monuments around campus that clearly state elements of the mission, values, or vision of Manresa to the individual student affairs staff members who can recite, and believe in, the mission and values statements of the institution, it is evident these statements are highly valued and core to the livelihood of the university. According to Marcus, a member of the vice president's staff, the level of commitment to the mission at Manresa is uncommon in higher education; he states,

> Like many other institutions, Manresa has a beautifully written mission statement but what I found, what really struck me when I came to campus to visit and to interview was that there was evidence, there was abundant evidence that that mission was being lived out on a day-to-day basis. That the mission didn't exist solely online, in isolation, but students, faculty and staff resonated with the mission and were committed to living that mission out in their day-to-day lives. I found that to be incredibly refreshing. It was something that I had not identified or experienced prior, at other places that I've worked at in my career.

Marcus's acknowledgement of frequent and consistent evidence of mission-driven practice at Manresa exemplifies the sentiments shared by other staff members and further establishes the significant and central role of Manresa's mission to the culture of the institution. During my first visit to campus, I was struck by the visual representations of their mission and values.

> The student union is a significantly older building compared to the brand new buildings it sits across from. … On the wall directly across from me is a bright, large banner that displays the university seal and its motto/promise—"helping students lead extraordinary lives." (Field notes, January 17, 2013)

The placement of the banner is significant in that it is not in or near the Admissions

Office or central administration building; it is intentionally centrally placed in the student

union, the hub of campus life. The statement is clear, bold, and establishes a high

standard for how members of the Manresa community, individually and collectively, are

to engage with and support their students. On a smaller scale, the messages of Manresa's

values and principle are also seen across campus.

> As I wait in the front office of the vice president's office suite, I'm drawn to the colorful small magnets on the file drawers across from me.
> "How wonderful is it that nobody need wait a single moment before starting to improve the world." —Anne Frank
> "Be the change you wish to see in the world." —Mahatma Gandhi
> "Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world; indeed, it's the only thing that ever has." —Margaret Mead
> Each magnet lists the division of student affairs' contact information at the bottom. Based on the design and shades of color, I assume a new design is made each year. (Field notes, January 17, 2013)

The production of these magnets is evidence that Jesuit values are prioritized, over

promotion of programs and services of the division, and that the division wants to

educate or motivate the campus community to act in accordance with those values. The

documents and publications I gathered when visiting departmental offices also include at

least one university values statement and/or those of the particular department. The

values statements are consistent, visual cornerstones at Manresa.

The mission is also vital for staff members of the division of student affairs.

Sixteen of the 19 staff members I interviewed addressed the mission or values of Manresa

University in my first question to them about why they selected to work at the institution.

Of those 16, only Tara, an assistant/associate director, noted the mission was not central

to her decision, but she acknowledged the mission as a center to the work of the

institution, "I think my story is different than what most folks will tell you. I'm guessing

that you probably get a lot of value-driven responses." Tara was right; answers for the

other 15 staff members to why they selected and stay at Manresa include direct links to

the institutional values and mission. A sampling of the answers to this question reflects

the central themes I heard from the staff of: values alignment with professional

philosophies; alignment with specific values; appreciation of being mission-driven; and

connection with their personal faith.

> Adrianne: Jesuit values really aligned with how I approached student affairs and working with the students.
>
> E: [I] was really drawn to the mission of the university; strong social justice, strong efficacy, focus on the underrepresented and marginalized populations.
>
> Jenny: Being at a mission-driven institution that's really huge for me especially. I think with the nature of the work that I'm doing is really congruent with my office and my programs and I'm not Catholic myself but I identify with a lot of the values that – having a place that we can have meaningful holistic conversations with students and sort of, have that transformative education piece is really huge.
>
> Stephanie: So my grad experience, we didn't necessarily have a departmental mission statement or values or anything really guiding our approach in our work. In looking at Manresa…that was definitely here.
>
> Spike: I really like working here. I think, you know, I have a Jesuit education. I think the Jesuit values and what that brings, I think it's just so much a part of me. I like how Manresa treats its students.

Several of the division of student affairs staff members are Jesuits, but it is not their faith

alone that draws them to the university; they appreciate how the tenets of the faith are

interpreted and lived out. Evidence of the mission's influence on the operations and

personnel of the institution are clear in most areas of the institution. Of specific note, the

values of Manresa were explicit in the assessment training created by members of the

division.

Reflection as assessment. Reflection is an important component of assessment; it can be a tool that aids in students' learning (Suskie, 2009) or it can support or reinforce overarching assessment practices. "Reflection can promote deep, lasting learning," and is a valuable and tangible practice for student affairs educators to begin their assessment journey as reflection is a common practice in the profession (Suskie, 2009, p. 162). Reflection is also a central practice of the Jesuit religious congregation of the Catholic Church. The Examen, a daily prayer of reflection, is a good example of the prevalence of reflection among Jesuits, which I discuss later. Because of the inherent learning associated with reflection, student affairs educators who desire to deepen and expand students' learning use reflection, but the use of reflection to learn about students' learning is not as common or natural. Student affairs educators can get so focused on the task at hand—helping students learn in their programs or through their experiences or services— that they do not use the same data to assess the effectiveness of the teaching and learning process. However, at Manresa a handful of staff members are paving the way for more reflection-based assessment in the division but embracing the power of reflection as an assessment tool.

Several Manresa student affairs staff members shared stories or examples of reflection in practice and connected it to assessment activity. This is a notable transition or development for these staff members, and the division, as utilizing both purposes of reflection (tool for student learning and assessment tool) can lay the foundation for larger, learning-based assessment practices. As an example, David says he speaks with his students in campus ministry all the time about translating their experiences as transferable skills; ultimately he wants them to be able to share their experiences and what they

learned to someone who is not connected or cares about campus ministry. The process

prepares students for communicating what they have learned but it also gives David

information and data to share with his supervisor and others to document students'

learning and the effectiveness of campus ministry in achieving its outcomes. While David

is more direct in his use of reflection and formative assessment with students, Adrianne

values the role of reflection but uses in a different way; he maintains reflection language

is more approachable and comfortable when discussing assessment-like activities with

colleagues. Adrianne finds informal, casual conversations with colleagues more fruitful

in gaining assessment data than engaging in a jargon-heavy assessment meeting. The use

of reflection questions with colleagues is more comfortable for him as he naturally thinks

about his work in a highly reflective manner, which he believes aligns with the work of

student affairs. Rose, on the other hand, takes a structured approach in asking students to

reflect on their learning. Rose shares:

> What we want to know is based on a student's participation in this campus
> ministry program, how have they changed? If our hope was that they would
> develop community, well, how can you articulate—what does that look like? And
> I developed some metrics around how students would articulate their sense of
> belonging, their sense of friendship, that people know their story. Those are parts
> of what it means to be a community. So part of it is how do you break that out.
> And then things like we would say we want students to deepen their relationship
> with God. How the hell do you measure that? I mean, it's a great question. But
> you think well, you measure it behaviorally, and you can ask a student are they
> praying more frequently? What types of prayer might they use? Do they pray
> alone? Do they pray with others? There's different ways I think of how that can
> be teased out.

Rose takes great care in breaking down ineffable outcomes to measurable and observable

components that students can reflect upon to grow as well as the staff can assess students'

learning and development. These three examples offer evidence of how student affairs

educators at Manresa are beginning to use reflection as an assessment tool that honors and sustains the values of the institution and the division. Identifying and utilizing assessment practices and tools that reflect and sustain student learning and the values of the institution is a significant step is establishing transformative assessment practices within a division of student affairs.

Examen as assessment. The vice president of student affairs annually supports or offers multiple assessment-based trainings, in-services, and webinars as well as commits to maintaining the divisional assessment committee, which he initiated a year after assuming his role. At first, I was impressed with the quantity of professional development offered as well as the fact that the majority of interviewed staff members were able to name one, if not a list of, assessment education workshops or initiatives provided in recent history. However, when asked what staff learned or received from these trainings the responses were surprisingly varied and inconclusive. I anticipated the quality and quantity of assessment training would dictate or determine assessment activity, but what I found is that context and purpose matters more to staff than having the skill set to conduct assessment, which is demonstrated in the way staff members describe and recall the Jesuit Examen assessment training. The Daily Examen is a technique developed by St. Ignatius to gain discernment for life through a guided reflection-based prayer. Developing faith-based assessment training is unique to religious institutions, but it cannot be assumed that all faith traditions have a prayer or practice that parallels assessment practice like the Jesuits.

The Jesuit Examen assessment training establishes a direct link between Manresa's values and the value of assessment, and as such is the most memorable and

commonly cited assessment-based professional development opportunity provided by the

division of student affairs at Manresa. This training was different than all the other

assessment sessions I was informed of for two reasons: (a) it incorporated the mission

and values of Manresa into assessment, and (b) it grew out conversations among frontline

and mid-level staff members. All other professional development opportunities provided

by or through the division were skills, tools, and approach-based with little, if any,

attention given to the context or reasons in which they would conduct assessment.

Assessment-based professional development focuses on "doing" assessment, not thinking

about or planning to create thoughtful assessment plans. Additionally, most training

topics are directed by a divisional leadership team whose members have different

rationale, motives, and goals for engaging in assessment than other staff members.

The Examen assessment session birthed from a conversation between a staff

member who is considered the "resident expert on Jesuits" and a staff member who is

very knowledgeable in assessment. They thought the session would be a good way to tie

the two concepts together—assessment and the Jesuit practice of reflection—to make

assessment more comfortable for folks, particularly those who did not care or know much

about assessment. The Examen prayer encourages people to seek God's presence in their

day with a grateful spirit, acknowledge emotions of the day, pray about a specific aspect

of the day, and then look to the next day. David provides a good description of how the

Examen assessment session began and its connection to assessment; he shares,

> I was in a committee last year where we were talking though, "How do we make
> Jesuit terms and ideals more accessible to our colleagues?" And the more we
> talked about the Examen; we were kind of like, "You know, this is really
> assessment." It's a personal assessment, but it's a formation kind of process....

But essentially, it's a quick check in and an assessment of: "Where were you successful and where were you not successful in your day?" from kind of a non-religious perspective. So looking at it that way, "Well, if I was successful in these areas, maybe I should put my energy into those programs tomorrow, or those conversations." Or for a student, "If I'm successful in these classes, maybe I should actually be this major," and, "If I hated this class and I continue to hate this class, maybe I should really let go of my hopes of being a doctor or a nurse or an engineer."

Because of that, last fall, we kind of put that out to the rest of the division to say, "Hey, let's look at this Examen as a way to assess." For some people who had never done assessment but were very religious, it was a nice new way of looking at it.

The Examen training was a great way to incorporate the highly valued mission of the university with a less-familiar and potentially scary, overwhelming, or new task: assessment. From what I ascertained about the session, it did not dive deeply into assessment methods or tools, but it did offer a conceptual springboard for how staff members could begin to implement assessment. The Examen is like self-assessment, with a spiritual twist. It has many possible connections to assessment practice, particularly in two ways: (a) it provides a basis for collaboration about programs and supporting student development, and (b) students are taught to self-assess and reflect using features of the Examen. The Examen provides a potential pathway for a leader who wants to create a robust, learning-oriented approach to how the division thinks about, commits to, and fulfills assessment. Unfortunately, there was no follow-up work or support of the Examen training, resulting in no guidance for staff members to begin their assessment implementation practice with elements of reflection already built-in.

Absence of values in divisional assessment. For all the evidence of mission and values within the division of student affairs, their assessment conversation and directives are generally void of how assessment can support or enhance the university mission.

Without situating assessment processes and outcomes in institution's values, "assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about" (AAHE, 1992, p. 1). Staff do not see assessment as a method of honoring, maintaining, and enhancing their mission, which is odd concerning their moral and ethical beliefs evidenced in their mission and values align with those of assessment, not accountability. One staff member, Rose, shares that through assessment "we demonstrate that we're being faithful to what our mission purpose is as a department," but she is the only one who associates the two. Most staff members perceive the role of assessment is to improve individual or particular programs through gaining an understanding of what students need, like, want, or learn from their programs and services. While this information and guidance is helpful and needed for staff members in planning individual programs, the contributions of individual programs and their effects on student learning are minimal, at best. Connecting to and affecting learning is a challenge in student affairs, because the majority of programs tend to be one-time experiences that are not intentionally or overtly connected with other experiences or programs. Manresa's division of student affairs is missing the opportunity, partly due to the priorities of the CSAO, to realize its contributions to students achieving the deeper, richer learning outcomes and possessing the desired values that Manresa espouses to develop in its students by not connecting its assessment practices with the mission and goals of the institution.

Several staff members acknowledge the need to justify the need for their division, departments, and programs to their academic counterparts and external constituents by sharing their value in terms of assessment. While the need to educate others about and

provide rationale for the value and contributions of student affairs is an on-going and

necessary task, offering data about one program that a fraction of students participate in

is not the answer. A part of the success of accountability is the cycle it creates for

educators to continuously to feel like they need to justify their existence through any

possible data they can easily provide. However, relying on quick and "easy" data offers

"answers" and numbers without getting to the bottom or root of the topic or program.

This cycle has several negative implications on staff morale, like feeling insecure in their

jobs that often result in working additional hours, and true assessment of student learning

and development in that evidence is not collected that justifies or supports the quality

work and programs offered to students. Accountability pressures drive staff to work

harder with minimal validation of their time and efforts, but assessment has the potential

to drive staff to work more effectively, confidently, and collaboratively because they

have the data that supports the purpose and effects of their work, which is aligned with

institutional values and goals. Adrianne, as a front-line staff member, begins to recognize

the gap and the greater need for coordinated assessment efforts, but he still misses the

connection to the institution's mission and values:

> What I struggle with a little bit is that departments are being asked to do
> assessments but I want to see it rolled up into something larger. Or just say that in
> the division these are our five areas of focus for students, and request that
> departments assess along those themes. So we can say collectively as a division,
> over time we are making progress in these five dimensions for our students. But
> right now it just seems like because we just want people to get used to doing
> assessment we're asking folks just to do it. So the thread I guess that ties all the
> departments together isn't there—it just feels very siloed. But I don't know that
> departments are seeing how assessment can benefit the division; it seems like
> we're just providing the division information**.**

Adrianne recognizes the value of "rolling up assessments into something larger" but he is stopping shy of the final step of connecting divisional activities and student learning to the university. For Adrianne, "something larger" is division level competencies or learning outcomes that all departments can see themselves in and contribute to. He wants the work in his department to be more than individual, discrete programs for a sub-population of students; linking his work and assessment efforts with other similar efforts in the division would give greater purpose and meaning to his work as well as more fully document the effect student affairs programs and experiences have on students. Manresa, specifically the division of student affairs, is missing the mark on establishing purposeful, integrated, and meaningful assessment structures and plans. They are undermining their ideologically driven, highly moral mission by not connecting their assessment practices and plans to university mission and values or using assessment as a process to validate, live, and strengthen their mission.

Looking to the CSAO, who has the most interaction with people outside of the division of student affairs, he is not connecting the assessment activities within the division to each other or to the institution; his focus is on justifying his division and its associated costs. Simplifying the work of student affairs to metrics of efficiency and cost devalue the complexity and depth of learning students experience in student affairs programs and experiences. Discussing and documenting student affairs work in numbers and evaluative data alone endangers the division's status and potential as a true partner in educating students. Dr. Alex describes his role in communicating assessment results as follows:

> And so there are specific things I need to be able to do within my area to say students are also being given these opportunities and I need to be able to say okay this is the efficacy of that program and what am I doing. And it's just not do they show up, do they have a good time. I need to be able to say here's why what I'm doing is making a difference because it ain't cheap.

Dr. Alex hit on several important concepts in his statement, including documentation of programs, efficacy of programs, and cost of programs and operations. He recognizes the need of each of these components as well as that they are interrelated. Dr. Alex's words reflect that he understands how assessment can be used to document that the work and programs done in his division are "making a difference" but in word and action the accountability measures direct what is happening in the division. On a macro-level, Dr. Alex has not provided a path for shared competencies or learning outcomes the division of student affairs can support and work to fulfill that connect to the larger competencies or learning outcomes of the university. He has not helped staff members to see the greater or larger picture of university assessment and how the division can support the overall mission and goals of the institution. Dr. Alex shares priorities and goals of the university, through the division directors' retreat, but he does not assist staff members in making the connection between the priorities and implications of work and assessment efforts of the staff. On a micro-level, department and division growth rhetoric dominates communication and operations. Everyone within the department uses assessment to name their evaluation and data collection processes, but the data and information they share address being accountable to the need to document and financially justify programs and departments. There are some learning outcome assessment efforts in the division, which are communicated in the annual report, but the data exists at such a micro-level that it can only be used to demonstrate the efficacy of individual programs, not departments or the

division. At the end of the day, values and purpose are absent from assessment practices within the division of student affairs, which make it difficult for individual staff members to feel like they are making a difference in their assessment efforts and for assessment efforts to enhance student learning.

Finally, not one staff member notes or recognizes that current assessment practices are not mission-driven or mission-strengthening. When assessment does not link to or support central functions or core beliefs of those in the division of student affairs, the work feels burdensome, unnecessary, and tangential, which results in minimal valuing and prioritizing of assessment. Rose voices her concern that current assessment practices do not honor the language or mission of all departments within the division, but she is not concerned with the larger framework. It is challenging enough to analyze a practice in the midst of conducting it, especially when there is great focus, attention, and pressure to conduct the practice; assessment definitely falls in this category. Even if staff members wanted to challenge philosophical concerns with divisional assessment practices, they likely would not be received well in this division's climate. The staff members would be seen as difficult or uncooperative because assessment is so clearly communicated as a priority for the entire division. The CSAO and other colleagues would likely interpret concerns with assessment and specific practices as disrespectful or devaluing to the CSAO or the growth and progress made in improving the division; it would be nearly impossible to separate items that are so closely linked together by others.

The void of institutional values in assessment is significant for Manresa as well as student affairs and higher education as a whole. According to American Association of Higher Education (1992), "Where questions about educational mission and values are

skipped over, assessment threatens to be an exercise in measuring what's easy, rather than a process of improving what we really care about" (p. 1). Assessment without educational mission and values serving as the backbone of the process is an empty process that does not improve student learning or move institutions closer to achieving their mission. Further, assessment without educational mission and values is not assessment, it is simply responding to accountability concerns. Staff members will not feel invested or see benefit of accountability practices, even if it is named assessment. Within Manresa's division of student affairs, as well as many other divisions across the nation, staff members begrudgingly "assess" their work because they are not really conducting assessment and addressing issues they really care about because accountability efforts, rhetoric, and practices have disguised themselves as assessment. The value system of accountability is significantly different than that of assessment, which turns education from quality learning to quality control. Educational mission and values must be at the core of assessment practices for student affairs and higher education to remain sources of deep learning, if not they will become like any other neoliberal economic enterprise: wholly concerned with profits, efficiency, and producing a product.

Reinterpretation of Jesuit Institution and Values

I conclude the Jesuit Institution and Values theme, an interpretation of my data, by interpreting the theme through three of the described neoliberal theoretical concepts—privatized public space, corporate culture, and religious faith: silencer of dissension—to offer a deeper level of meaning to the data. New, richer meaning is made through the reinterpretation of my data more fully to answer my research question.

Privatized public space and Jesuit institution and values. Even in an

institution like Manresa, founded on Jesuit values and principles and committed to the

common goals of higher education to enhance U.S. democracy and improve society,

assessment is more aligned with neoliberal than democratic principles. Whether by

choice or force, student affairs educators are not driving assessment efforts in the

division. Assessment is dictated by the CSAO, who in the neoliberal lens represents

corporations, while the entirety of his staff represent society, consciously and

subconsciously accepting his view and approach to assessment as correct and necessary.

Staff members allow the CSAO to drive the assessment plan and rhetoric because they:

(a) do not really understand assessment and therefore want someone else to make

decisions for them; (b) default to seeing it as important and necessary due to the constant

rhetoric across student affairs, higher education, the media, and the public; and (c) have

not taken time to consider the implications of their assessment practices. The theoretical

concept of privatized public space offers perspective on each of the reasons student

affairs educators shy away from assessment and engage in accountability efforts.

First, higher education and student affairs further open their doors to external

constituents participating in or directing their work by not learning about assessment and

therefore relinquish control of how it is designed and conducted. While some might

consider this a more democratic, shared approach, it instead, in effect, aligns with the

corporatization of higher education. Education becomes more privatized as society, and

eventually educators, buy into the idea education should serve corporations first and

foremost. It is amazing how quickly student affairs educators acknowledge they do not

know a skill or about a topic, and at the same time it is astonishing how rarely they are

challenged to learn the skills or about the topic. Dr. Harper, a current professor and former student affairs professional, recognizes and names this phenomenon by challenging educators to reject confession of illiteracy and incompetence among staff (2014). Essentially, educators must hold each other accountable to the information and skills they should know and use research to not be negligent in their duty to educate students to the best of their ability, being current on research, national trends, exemplar practice, and content knowledge. Similar to other fields, it is not acceptable just to learn a professional practice in school; on-going education is essential to effective practice.

The overwhelming majority of student affairs educators at Manresa who participated in this study acknowledge their deficiencies in the area of assessment, and in the course of interviews do not share how they seek to learn more. Staff members do not directly say they do not understand assessment, but it is clear through their lengthy answers to the challenges of assessment that there are more unanswered than answered questions about assessment. The unanswered questions cover the big areas of assessment, from knowing what to ask, how to find the answer, and how to analyze data. Assessment can be a time consuming and challenging task, so I am not minimizing the capabilities or intelligence of the Manresa staff, but it is important to note they acknowledge they have a lot more to learn about assessment and there is little motivation to learn. Further, they also speak to the desire and need to hire a fulltime director of assessment for the division as a solution to establishing a culture of assessment within the division. Similar to the magic-bullet testing and systems consistent with accountability discourses described earlier, hiring a director of assessment shifts the collective responsibility of assessment to one individual, which philosophically is aligned with neoliberalism for two reasons. The

obvious parallel is literally one person is selecting, directing, and controlling all assessment efforts for the division and taking responsibility for the activity and results as well as teaching the staff how to conduct the needed assessments, a bureaucratic, top-down approach. There is not a collaborative approach to assessment. As a result, members of the staff focus on doing assessment "right" or well enough for someone else to finish it instead of learning how to do complete their own assessment projects, which leads to the second point. Hiring a director of assessment shifts the locus of control further away from individual staff members who understand and work directly with students and programs that need to be assessed to others who are less familiar, if familiar at all, with the activities. The outcome of this shift is that assessment of student learning and development quickly becomes devalued and irrelevant and larger accountability metrics become more important. According to the principles of good practice for assessing student learning, assessment is most effective and significant when it addresses issues or questions people truly care about (AAHE, 1992). Lack of investment of student affairs educators in assessment questions and practices jeopardizes the ability of assessment outcomes to make a difference in student learning. The neoliberal economy grows as it privatizes public space (i.e., education, student affairs). When student affairs educators give up authority and control of assessment to "others" they are in effect allowing neoliberalism to grow more powerful within higher education.

Second, the constant assessment and accountability rhetoric leads people to believe these are societal issues, and that higher education has not properly handled them so business and others must step in to "fix" or "rescue" the academy. Corporations gain entrée to higher education through providing support, guidance, and expertise while

removing values and uniqueness of mission from the assessment and accountability

rhetoric, allowing for standardized, corporate-driven notions and practices of

accountability to prevail. If higher education is to maintain democratic principles and

ideals within education and everyday life (as well as democratic principles such as free

speech) and to act as a force to maintain and strengthen democracy, educators must

defend "higher education as an institution of civic culture whose purpose is to educate

students for active and critical citizenship" (Giroux, 1999, p. 158). Higher education is

responsible for maintaining its mission and role in society as a public good that cannot be

bought and sold by corporations as a mere commodity, and part of this duty includes

analyzing requests, partnerships, and other externally initiated activities for intended and

unintended consequences that could compromise the position of higher education in

society. If institutions are not careful, they could simply become training grounds or

factories that turnout requested workers to fulfill mindless tasks. The PK–12 education

system serves as a warning and example of how commercial products and canned

professional development produce educators who have no idea what to do and search

haphazardly for the next right fix, as none of the for-profit products seem to work.

Additionally, academic freedom, critical thinking, and the liberal arts would disappear

from the academy, which is a significant and justified fear of faculty members. These

statements and controversies address higher education in general, but they each are

relevant and applicable to all subsections of institutions, like student affairs. In particular

to my last point, subsections have a greater responsibility to monitor practices internally

and externally for implications and consequences. For example, a division of student

affairs receives the message to engage in assessment, both dictated by the institution and

student affairs professional associations, and thus looks to the student affairs field for applicable models, tools, and other resources. The selection of resources should be vetted before implemented. Ultimately, divisions of student affairs, institutions, higher education, or members of society cannot assume others have their best interest in mind, even if someone else is providing an answer or solution to current problems; they could be the one who created the problem in the first place. Corporations have great power (i.e., money, control of media messages, influence over politicians) that they can control and direct as needed to gain power and market share.

Lastly, building on my previous point, student affairs educators at Manresa are neither contemplating nor analyzing their assessment practices or approaches, beyond explaining why they do not have time to spend on it or what appears to be the best or easiest tool or method to use, because they have no reason to know what assessment is capable of and how it can be integral to their practice. When student affairs educators are not mindful of their work, especially elements or resources gathered from others, it is easy to lose control or ownership of the work. Then, work "guided only by the controlling yardstick of profit undermines the role of the university as a public sphere dedicated to addressing the most serious social problems a society faces" (Giroux, 1999, 154). This is a significant issue because it can result in "assessment" practices under-mining and contradicting the efforts of the program the educator is assessing. Especially with the growing financial concerns of institutions of higher learning, institutions look to corporate sponsorships and gift dollars to subsidize expenses, and corporations have the upper hand going into negotiations because they have the resources. So what initially appears to be a good idea and revenue stream could result in the institution sacrificing its

mission and public space to keep its doors open. Taking time to analyze practice is not easy but critical work because it allows institutions and educators to develop mutually beneficial partnerships and maintain their mission and values.

Similar to members of society in the neoliberal economy, student affairs educators too quickly give up their power in assessment because they need or want the short-term benefit associated with it. A part of the vicious neoliberal cycle is that individuals become dependent on the system built by corporations because corporations establish a real or perceived level of despair about the reality of individual lives while continuing to raise the standard of what people should achieve or own. As such, individuals feel helpless and more easily give in to short-term cures than fight for long-term, societally progressive solutions. It is this cycle that allows standardized tests (i.e., ACT, SAT, GRE), student "assessment" surveys (i.e., NSSE, EBI, MSL), assessment management software companies (i.e., Campus Labs), and other off-the-shelf assessment tools to thrive in and drive higher education. Not only does this cycle remove individual thought and collective goals of student affairs educators to live and enhance the mission of student affairs, which results in the expansion of privatized public space, but it also directly supports the financial side of the neoliberal economy by helping corporations (e.g., those to build the assessment tools and market them to politicians) profit and gain power.

Corporate culture and Jesuit institution and values. Manresa's mission, vision, values, and promise are in direct opposition to those of the neoliberal economy yet their approach to assessment does not align with this polarity. Like most of higher education, Manresa seeks to develop well-rounded, active citizens and leaders who

understand the complex structure of the world from various disciplines and views. As

defined earlier, neoliberal corporate culture desires "compliant workers, depoliticized

consumers, and passive citizens" (Giroux, 1999, p. 148), even from college-educated

individuals. This is possible because of the incessant market-driven notion that freedom

is expressed through one's ability to consume (Giroux, 2014); essentially, neoliberalists

want individuals to see selecting an institution of higher learning as a commodity that

individuals have the ability and freedom to select, just as every other choice available to

them. Education is a commodity in the neoliberal economy. Instead of viewing education

as a tool or source for a stronger, better society, in the neoliberal economy:

> Citizens are treated by the political and economic elite as restless children and are
> "invited daily to convert the practice of citizenship in the art of shopping."
> Shallow consumerism coupled with an indifference to the needs and suffering of
> others has produced a politics of disengagement and a culture of moral
> irresponsibility. (Giroux, 2014, p. 6)

Further, "neoliberal governance has produced an economy and a political system almost

entirely controlled by the rich and powerful" (Giroux, 2014, p. 9). Getting a college

degree, especially from an elite institution, is seen by most U.S. citizens as a way for

youth to have a chance of becoming an elite, wealthy, and powerful member of society,

or at least having a "good" life. For the select few who attend elite institutions and

receive a degree that provides the education and training to be the leaders and thinkers of

society, this statement is fairly true (Anyon, 1980). Yet only a handful of institutions of

higher learning fall into the elite category. Manresa has a strong, distinctive, and

community-oriented mission that challenges system of inequality and consumerism as

well as works for the community, all of which oppose the values of neoliberalism, even if

there are Catholic practices that display neoliberal qualities. It is likely that this

information would lead people to believe Manresa is an elite institution that is not subject to the same demands for order, obedience, and selfishness as the rest of society. I do not have data to confirm or deny their overall academic approach through Anyon's (1980) classifications of schools; however, looking at the focus of the assessment rhetoric within the division, which is reflective of the entire institution, is about program evaluation with sprinklings of student-learning assessment. The division of student affairs' assessment plans and actions reflect a prioritization of adherence to external standards and desire for accountability.

Everything about Manresa is steeped in traditions of helping others, challenging inequalities, and enhancing the world, but their efforts to sustain their work through assessment oppose these values and can ultimately need them astray. Between the desires of institutional leadership and staff members for Manresa to thrive and be competitive and the desires of parents and students for the investment in graduating from Manresa to result in a good job and life, the need for individual success honored in society ultimately outweighs the desire to look out for others and ensure one gets everything for which one pays. The individual consumer focus of these desires influences assessment practices, as well as all practices, at Manresa and steers them away from the value and benefit of attending a strong, top-tier institution. Manresa graduates will maintain the rhetoric that "everyone has a chance," believing they have a better chance than most to obtain wealth because of their degree and the network they tapped into by attending Manresa. However, the underlining reason and reality of this belief is critical. Will Manresa's students believe "everyone has a chance" because of their commitment to living out the beliefs, values, and mission of Manresa to undo systems of inequality and fight for a more just

society that is honored and sustained through institutional assessment efforts? Or will

they believe "everyone has a chance" because "assessment" indicates the education they

received is effective and worth the financial investment? While institutions need to be

mindful of call for accountability and data, their mission and future rest on how they

decide to sustain themselves through their assessment efforts. Neoliberal, consumer-

based metrics will ultimately distance institutions from their commitment to learning,

critical thinking, and other democratic ideals.

Religious faith: Silencer of dissension and Jesuit institution and values. As a

religious-affiliated institution, Manresa University has an added layer to address in

assessing student learning and development: faith development. Fortunately for Manresa,

staff members appreciate and desire to honor Jesuit principles, values, and tenants in their

work. Alignment of institutional and staff beliefs make it easier for the mission to be

lived and achieved as well as for everyone to see how faith influences their work. Even

with this common foundation, it is challenging to assess faith development, both from

social and assessment perspectives. Rose, a member of the campus ministry staff, shares

the hurdles facing assessment of faith development on both accounts.

> Most of my colleagues who are at director level of campus ministry don't
> understand how to do assessments. I think it's absolutely crucial. And let me say
> this. People will come right out and say you cannot assess the work that campus
> ministry does. And I have a real strong reaction that—and part of it is we can, it's
> just you need to know which methodology to use. And we also need, I think, to be
> clear about what is the learning outcome, and then what might the other kinds of
> goals that we have that you might not have easily translated into a learning
> outcome.
>   Learning is a cognitive function. And we certainly have some of those cogni-
> tive functions in the work that we do in campus ministry. But we have others that
> are more social/emotional/spiritual. And I think to articulate those as goals but
> also say that here's the evidence that we think demonstrates that we're being
> effective. The other—here's what I've learned in terms of why it's important to

assess what we do in campus ministry…it's the way that, first off, we demonstrate that we're being faithful to what our mission purpose is as a department and also helping the university people fill broader goals and educating students.

While Rose is the only one who acknowledges there are people who believe faith work cannot be assessed, there are many student affairs educators who believe their work is also nearly impossible to assess. Part of the reason for this response is they do not understand how to assess and therefore cannot create an assessment plan that will allow them to get the answers they seek, or they are not willing to learn how to assess in this way. But for some, they legitimately believe their work is so unique or special that it cannot be assessed. Regardless, giving permission to faith development, or any socially conscious or complex cognitive growth, areas to not engage in assessment permits: (a) the chosen elite to get a pass on being assessed at this level, and (b) assessment results to demonstrate the effectiveness of colleges and universities in aiding students in their growth and development. In the neoliberal economy, the perception that everyone has the same chance to succeed is important. Therefore, information about the resources and opportunities given to the elite is kept to a minimum. In a neoliberal, Christian society, access to special religious teaching and experiences are held in high regard and "kept" for the "deserving" elite. The economic "religious right" draws on and assimilates to religious faith to control messages about power, fairness, access, and equity.

Great learning occurs when student affairs educators uphold principles of good practice. The principles encourage educators to facilitate active learning, aid in developing values and ethics, setting high standards, and building supportive communities for students (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 1997). Student affairs educators, at

Manresa and on other campuses, are engaging in these effective practices daily. Yet, there appears to be a major system failure in higher education, according to the media and federal government. Why this disconnect? From a young age my mother has always said that anyone can make the numbers say what they want them to say. As a nurse, she is mindful of numbers (i.e., dosage amounts, time) and their effects on patients as well as the importance of checking sources and validating data. Without the full picture, numbers could indicate one reality when another is possible. Similarly, to remove personal development from the assessment conversation, the numbers might not look positive or promising. Therefore, when areas of critical thinking, moral development, faith development, and other high-level learning opportunities are not included in the overall assessment of student learning while attending a college or university, the numbers might not look very good. So why then would we not want these areas assessed?

Not including judgment and data on important learning factors can make non-profit institutions look worse than they are and open the door for for-profit institutions and other external solutions to enter the higher education arena. If liberal arts and social justice focused institutions, like Manresa, are removed from the higher education landscape because of their perceived deficiency in preparing graduates for industry, not society, our society is at risk of losing our collective ability to think creatively, strategically, and holistically about social issues, community development, or the future. Ingenuity and life-altering research in all fields would also significantly decrease. In addition, the moral and ethical compass of society could shift to a more individualistic approach, resulting in less care for and consideration of others or secondary affects of decisions. A world ruled by the bottom line mentality limits the perspective and priorities

of society and its citizens; we cannot lose sight of democratic values for the sake of community and citizen's quality of life.

Excellence

The second theme is excellence, the drive and commitment of the CSAO to be excellent. As the top position in the division, the CSAO's approach to leadership and work significantly affects his staff members and the mentality of the division. Manresa's CSAO is the reason assessment is a major priority for the division, and because of his charismatic personality and style members of the division are aligning their assessment language with his. In this section, I describe the CSAO's excellence-focused leadership style with specific attention on his "just do it" mentality and drive to assess, the role pleasing each other within the division has on assessment, and some of the effects of excellence. Finally, I reinterpret the entire theme of excellence through neoliberal concepts, specifically corporate culture and autonomous agents.

The CSAO's leadership style. The message Dr. Alex clearly communicates in his position at Manresa is he is driven to make the division of student affairs a premier division. He desires excellence in himself and his staff as well as in the work they do. Dr. Alex challenges his staff members to have nationally recognized programs and services, and he will do what he is capable of to support their efforts. He is committed to excellence. During my formal interview with Dr. Alex, he shares how driven he is by competition and the affect it has on his work.

> Dr. Alex: For me it's the full competition. When I got here I said I want to be known…within the Jesuit network, and I believe Jesuit schools do student affairs, student development at a higher level only because it's part of our mission. It's part of the fabric of a Jesuit culture.

Erin: So it's natural.

Dr. Alex: It's natural. So we don't have to justify why we are doing that. The care and development of the whole person is almost a 500-year-old philosophy by Jesuits. And American higher education, 200–300 years old, so it's different. So when I got here I said I want to be known within the Jesuit network as a premier division, in every sense of the word.

    And so that competition which is I guess in a way is external—it's driven us to be innovative, to be creative, and to assess what we're doing to see if it makes a difference. It's one thing for other people to look at us that way, but I wanted us to look at ourselves that way too. And that will really require a lot of assessment to be going on. So when I look at people who have been most successful…they're doing assessment.

Erin: So that sense of competition thing motivates you, does it motivate your staff or what motivates them?

Dr. Alex: It motivates some of the staff. And I hope it motivates just enough for them to keep the movement you know. Some people are not motivated by competition.

Erin: Why not? [laughing]

Dr. Alex: Right? Some people are completely not. Well, when we did strength finder I could count on my hand who, outside of athletics, had competition as a strength. I could count it on my hand.

Dr. Alex is not secretive or bashful about his drive to lead the best division of student affairs, by making Manresa's division into the best. In his mind, being the best is the right and good approach to leadership, and the implications or consequences are negligible. Dr. Alex is also clear about his level of competition and how it drives him to achieve. While he recognizes competition is not a strong source of motivation for his staff members, it is the number one driver for how he approaches work. He believes that competition is the driver of innovation and creativity among staff as well as the reason for the amount of assessment happening within the division. Yet these statements do not add up; there is a missing link in his line of thinking. If competition is not important to staff members, it

cannot be the reason that they are engaging in assessment. The staff members may be

motivated by Dr. Alex's level of competition and want to help him reach his goal, or their

goal depending on how you look at it, but it is likely not an internal desire to be the best

that drives the assessment activity within the division. Yet, assessment is being conducted

across the division, unlike what was happening before Dr. Alex started at Manresa, so his

leadership is a factor to examine in how a culture of assessment is being built within the

division. There are a couple critical implications of his leadership that affect his staff and

how assessment of student learning and development is conducted within the division.

First, I address the positive implications on assessment practice under an

excellence approach to leadership. The obvious strength and power of excellence

discourse lies within semantics: no one wants to be anti-excellence or anti-individual.

Most people desire and strive to achieve excellence. Further, Dr. Alex's commitment to

excellence is likely part of the reason he was hired as the president is committed to

making Manresa the top Jesuit institution in the nation. Tara provides a quick summary

of Manresa's recent history to illuminate how Dr. Alex fits into the greater plan of the

university president:

> I think Manresa was not in a good place, 11 or so years to go. It was—so my dad
> worked at the medical center actually, I was getting into the field of education in
> 2001 and telling him I was going to switch careers and wanted to work in higher
> ed. His one statement was, "Anywhere but Manresa; don't work at Manresa. It's a
> hot mess; you don't want to be involved in it. You don't want to touch it."
> We [Manresa] got a new president about the same time and [he] came in 2002
> and has really created a culture of high expectations, a culture of excellence. I
> think he's brought other people with him who've done the same, kind of the same
> push and perspective. Dr. Alex certainly came with a desire to improve and shape
> up the division of student development. I think it's a combination—I think it
> comes from a combination of things, but Manresa is it completely different
> institution than it was 11 years ago. There was a time in which the health center,
> the medical center, which we no longer own the hospital, at the time it as

challenging because they were funding a lot of what was going on, the university wasn't financial in a good place, but that has all obviously—you see all the buildings and all the change and all the programs and all that has changed…[the president] has done a lot. Just completely changed the place around.

Manresa's leadership is aggressive in their pursuit to be the top Jesuit institution in the nation, and they have accomplished a lot in a short amount of time. The future looks positive for Manresa, Dr. Alex, and the division of student affairs as well. At the summer strategic planning retreat, Dr. Alex shared comments on the positive status and growth of the university and made a point to say funds are available for new initiatives because enrollment is higher than expected. The situation Manresa is a rarity in higher education due to the economic and financial crisis of the past decade, which affects families' ability to pay increasing tuition prices and the diminishing number of students attending four-year universities within the state. Manresa's leaders are focused on achieving success, set by external factors, and it is helping their bottom line. As such, the approach and method by which to achieve success is set by the president and members of his leadership team, and they are committed to excellence, defined as being the premier Jesuit institution in the nation.

In terms of achieving excellence, Dr. Alex believes his division is set up to be a premier division of student affairs because of the Jesuit mission. He sees working at a Jesuit institution reduces the work of student affairs and the CSAO in defending the role of student affairs in the operation of the institution. The Jesuit institution dynamic removes one layer of defense for student affairs: within the institution. Therefore, not having the burden of time to justify student affairs' work to colleagues and the doubt that can surround the division's contributions to students and the institution allow student

affairs at Manresa to focus its assessment data on contributing, supporting, and supplementing that of the university. At non-Jesuit institutions, divisions of student affairs often need to work diligently to gain the support and trust of academic affairs before being able to contribute to the great campus conversation on assessment. Dr. Alex's competitive nature and drive inspire him to set high goals, encourage innovation, and make assessment a key aspect of the work due within the division. As he says, other strong divisions are engaging in assessment. It is not clear if assessment is a cause or effect of the other division's premier status, but he recognizes assessment is a part of the "success" equation. The addition of assessment as a priority is a direct result of Dr. Alex's commitment to excellence. While the excellence focus might not provide the best or most helpful assessment mindset or direction, Dr. Alex is the reason most assessment of student learning and development is happening within the division.

Second, regarding challenges, Dr. Alex's focus on being excellent by other (external) standards shifts the focus of the work by him and members of his staff from one attentive to and directed by the values, goals, and students of Manresa to one primarily dictated, directed, and judged by others. National and professional standards for excellence are aligned with exemplary practices and research, but when the attention of work shifts away from campus, it is not good for campus, its students and staff, and assessment practices. Assessment, unlike research, must be localized to be beneficial. Additionally, it appears the rest of the division staff members are not motivated in the same way Dr. Alex is, which has a significant affect on the way staff members interpret and internalize the excellence message. A few staff members note and appreciate the drive to be nationally recognized but also feel the downside of working overtime to

achieve the goal. Divisional staff members are quick to comment on how busy they are and that if something more is added to their plates that other items will need to go for everything to fit. Dr. Alex is cognizant of how busy his staff is and how they feel about their work. In response to my question about what might be holding the division back from having a critical mass of staff members involved in assessment back, he offers, "Oh, the demand on people's time. I think people are working really hard and there's so much to do." He further explains that he pushes people to create teams to accomplish the work so the task is less of a burden. Instead of changing the standard or timeline, Dr. Alex offers strategies and systems to accomplish the goals. His gesture of "care" is lost on the staff. Dr. Alex has high standards and a demanding vision for the division and he is not going to back away from them, but he will attempt to provide support, encouragement, and guidance to accomplish the tasks in an efficient or more enjoyable manner.

　　　　Just do it mentality. In practice, Dr. Alex sets up excellence as not being perfect the first time but getting there in time. He promotes a "just do it" mentality and approach to his staff members. Not necessarily in the same vein as the "it's better to ask for forgiveness than permission" mantra, but more as "do not get caught up in thinking too much or trying to do things perfect the first time"; he wants them to move beyond thinking about assessment into conducting it. Perhaps he is giving permission to a culture of trial and error, an approach that can be comforting and reassuring to staff members. Yet, a trial and error approach with assessment can lead to a series of poor decisions based on poorly conducted assessment and inaccurate information. Rushing to conduct assessment, particularly when lacking a philosophy of assessment, can have major implications on all involved, now and in the future, in terms of programs, expectations,

and funding. It is clear that a small number of staff members in the division recognize assessment is about understanding and involving student learning and development and feel confident in conducting meaningful assessments based upon my conversations with them. Some "assessment" conducted within the division is completed by staff members who care and want to do it right, but do not have the appropriate training, education, and experience to conduct the assessment they want to do, or at the level they want. There are also a few staff members who have a foundational knowledge of assessment and are figuring out the details as they go because they want to do what is best. Yet there are others who complete assessment projects in order only to have numbers to report at the end of the year. Not only is this harmful for the current and future programs and students, but removing intentionality and planning that accompanies quality assessment reduces or removes staff members' examination of assessment practices and tools for unintended or subconscious effects. Engaging is assessment, or any significant responsibility, cannot be done blindly; it must be done thoughtfully and carefully to ensure all involved are treated fairly and the work provides beneficial outcomes.

CSAO's drive to assess. Dr. Alex did not waste much time getting settled in his position as vice president and establishing a vision for the division's future. Within a year of his arrival, he led the division in creating a comprehensive strategic plan, instructed all departments to include assessment results in their annual report, and created an assessment committee. He did not want staff members to get caught up in the details of assessment or doing it "right" the first time so he encouraged them to jump right in. As an example, Dr. Alex encourages his staff to present at conferences as an indirect method of encouraging assessment. He offers the following perspective on how conference

presentations act as motivation for improvement and assessment:

> If you can get out there and you're showing people who you are and what you do, people are going to ask questions. Honestly, the show and tell—that's what they start off as, show and tell. I'm not afraid of show and tell because you're going to ask a question. And the question's going to cause you to think differently about what you do and form a question in your head. So when I got here I started telling people you ought to present at a national conference and we were doing it left and right. So people did it. They wanted to do it so they just started presenting. But then to keep that up you've got to have some depth, some substance to improvement.

Ultimately, even if the staff did not know exactly what they were doing, Dr. Alex assumes that his staff members are learning in time how to assess because they are selected to present at conferences. He also finds offering financial support and extrinsic rewards as good extrinsic motivational factors for staff members to begin doing something they would not have done on their own. But what I find interesting is that none of the staff members talked about their presentations, nor did Dr. Alex share how the division or its programs and students benefitted from the presentations, specifically in terms of learning. The division, Dr. Alex, and individual staff members did, however, likely benefit from the increased notoriety from the presentations, but they are not significant or associated with overall assessment activity for the division. It is likely, since Dr. Alex was not overt about his intentions with conference presentations, that staff members did not connect their presentation work with their assessment efforts. Regardless, preparing a presentation is a good academic exercise and hopefully one that benefits staff members, and subsequently the students they work with.

As an aside, presenting at conferences about assessment was one of the selection criterion used to determine the case for my study. While I did not imagine or foresee the CSAO using presentations in this manner, I am not aware if other potential sites have

other incentive programs for presenting or the effect these programs have on building a culture of assessment. Therefore, I stand by the established selection criteria for the case as the assessment is still conducted and shared through a peer-reviewed process.

All of the assessment efforts initiated or supported by the CSAO are evidence of his commitment to and desire for assessment to be a priority for the division. Dr. Alex is following much of the advice about engaging in assessment. He selected Schuh and Upcraft's (2001) assessment plan as the model they will follow and has supported the financial and human resources needed to engage in the outlined activities. However, the division leadership has yet to create divisional outcomes for departments to connect to and align with, which was an objective of the strategic plan that would help move discreet programmatic assessment into more meaningful student learning outcomes. Adrianne is the only staff member who notes a desire for more coordinated and meaningful assessment in the division, but that does not mean others do not think about or desire it. The CSAO is so focused on achieving the goal of assessment as a divisional priority that he is not considering the bigger picture or implications of his decisions. Directing staff to engage in assessment without purpose, direction, or structure minimizes assessment to be simple reporting of information and data. Perhaps Dr. Alex believes the Assessment Committee is providing the structure, coordination, and dissemination of assessment for the division, but as a member of the committee Adrianne would know if that was happening and to what degree. Even privy to all the Assessment Committee's work, Adrianne yearns for a more meaningful and connected process. While the "just do it" message adds a lot of assessment activity to the division, the activity is just that: activity; it does not result in positive changes in student learning.

Pleasing each other. There is an interesting cycle for motivation to assess within the division of student affairs. As shared in Dr. Alex's comments in the beginning of the leadership theme, he is more concerned about those external to the division believing he and the division are excellent than his staff members believing they are excellent. Essentially, he wants his staff to believe they are great and that their aspirations for greatness are tied with conducting a lot of assessments, even though the entire effort is for external recognition and praise. Dr. Alex is attempting to stay focused or attentive to his staff members' potential reasons for engaging in assessment even though he knows he is obviously the one who leads the initiative and makes it a priority for the division. He tries to appeal to their competitive, extrinsic, or prideful desires for excellence and to encourage their engagement with assessment. From the staff members' perspective, they are conducting assessments to complete the requirements of their job, specifically additional duties to assess their programs and services, and to make their CSAO happy. One staff member who works closely with the CSAO shares with pride that she believes, based on the Leader-Member Exchange Theory (LMX), she is in the "in-group"; she knows what the CSAO wants and is able to provide the results he needs. While other staff members are not as direct in explaining if they are a member of the in- or out-group, it was usually clear in my conversations with staff members that they knew where they and others stood with the CSAO. If I wanted, at any time I could have asked a staff member to list which staff members fall into any given category and they would give it to me. In multiple interviews the names were on their lips.

A few department directors are not concerned about their standing with the CSAO, mostly because they are confident in their position and do not desire to change or

put in the work needed to join the in-group, but entry and mid-level professionals

acknowledge they are doing assessments to make the CSAO happy. Making the CSAO

happy is not necessarily the only reason, but numerous staff members share that, if Dr.

Alex leaves or shifts his priorities away from assessment, most people will stop doing the

work. Dr. Alex has, intentionally or unintentionally, created a culture of insecurity among

his staff, which results in what Chomsky (2014) calls a "healthy" organization, because

employees do not ask for anything and are simply thankful to have jobs. So while more

assessment is being conducted in Manresa's division of student affairs because of

people's desires to make others happy, pleasing others or joining the in-group is not a

sustainable motivating factor for achieving excellence or conducting useful or meaningful

assessment of student learning and development. Pulling from the leader-member

exchange (LMX) theory (Graen, 1976), it is easier to lose sight of values and ethics when

staff members are focused on getting and maintaining in-group status, resulting in

questionable decisions and actions that improve image over everything else. Ultimately,

pleasing others to achieve excellence is like building a foundation on sand; it is unstable

and ever-changing.

Effects of excellence. Whether intentional or not, the attention on excellence and

external status by the CSAO influences the way the rest of the staff members view him

and the assessment initiatives. Staff members are neither complaining about the success

of the institution and the division nor the leadership, but they recognize aspects of their

work are seen as more valuable than others. "Growing" was a consistent word used by

staff members to reflect the culture of the division at large and the culture of assessment

within the division. More programs, more events, and more time spent on increasing

numbers and increasing quality are of highest priority. At the strategic planning retreat, the director for the student activities department shared in her report of accomplishments that her department hosted over 800 events during the academic year. That is an amazingly large number of programs for one department. The growth approach to improvement is not necessarily bad; it appears to be working for Manresa. However, this mentality has setup assessment to be something that is externally driven and established, not an initiative built by the staff members of Manresa to direct and improve their work; further, this level of growth is not sustainable. Their practices reflect the influence of neoliberalism, as they mirror and mimic those used by business, which favor simple measures and preset goals.

When staff members articulate the role and purpose of assessment, they focus on the external reasons to do the work, like: proving worth; articulating what students learn to recruit more students; improving staying power of programs; and having clear expectations. Jim, a member of the vice president's staff, articulates how he sees the prioritization of assessment within the division:

> First of all I think as we try to improve the excellence of the division of student development, assessment is critical as far as improving the overall quality of programs. I think it's also critical in the university at large where we can point to assessment we are doing and point to the effectiveness of our programs to leverage resources as the university at large. We can demonstrate where there's the need. We can demonstrate that money is being spent wisely. We can demonstrate that it's a good investment to give us additional resources.

Jim suggests excellence and assessment are tied to resources allocation and efficiency, a perception not much different than those of his colleagues. Again, this association is not inherently bad; but, it is perhaps not as meaningful and moving as other, more internally motivated, purposes like the ones they shared when I asked why they continue to work at

Manresa. Staff members enjoy their careers because of the students, quality relationships, clear values, and the common bond between the university mission and actual work of employees. When answers to these two questions are juxtaposed, it becomes clear that the activities and initiatives established to advance assessment within the division are actually creating barriers to assessment becoming a part of the division's culture. The assessment initiatives are separate from existing practices and not connected to what matters to the people of Manresa. In every way, assessment was introduced and structured as a distinct, new action and goal as well as was centered on the external pressure to be better than other divisions of student affairs, which is counter-cultural at Manresa. Staff members philosophically struggle to embrace the CSAO's drive for excellence, as defined now, and for this reason a culture of assessment is highly unlike to ever form within the division.

Reinterpretation of Excellence

As a culture, we generally believe excellence desirable and honorable, but the lens through which excellence is viewed is important. As shown in Astin's (1985) excellence in education delineations of resource, reputation, and talent development, excellence is treated and viewed differently in each scenario. The same is true when looking at excellence in terms of assessment, specifically at Manresa University. The demands of the neoliberal economy are influencing how the CSAO and others interpret and work to achieve excellence. The neoliberal concepts of corporate culture and autonomous agents assist in exposing new layers or perspectives on excellence in assessment.

Corporate culture and excellence. In the Excellence theme, I show the dominant leadership style as a drive for excellence demonstrated by the CSAO, Dr. Alex, affects

assessment and general operations of the department. My theoretical analysis connected

to the corporate culture concept leads me to two conclusions about the role of excellence

in the division. First, the desire of staff members to please and support the CSAO is

indicative of a neoliberal corporate culture that holds all the power at the top of the

organization. Second, how excellence is defined significantly affects how staff work and

conduct assessment. Nothing is inherently wrong with excellence, but as addressed in the

Review of Literature there are many approaches to excellence, each with their own inten-

tions and implications. Each of these conclusions has implications on assessment, how it

is viewed, conducted, and sustained, as a result of the CSAOs leadership and goals.

Most people desire to be liked and know that their contributions matter, a natural

human instinct. This sentiment is also true to one's workplace, though there is additional

incentive to be recognized and valued by organization management because salary,

access, and mobility of position can be tied to one being in good standing with one's boss

or other members of management. As such, it matters if there is a genuine desire to do

good work or if there is a fear of not being in the boss' in-group. The acknowledgement

that in- and out-groups exist within the division of student affairs and the consistent

message of adherence to the CSAO's approach toward assessment leads me to believe

there is a level of fear within the organization to please the CSAO. Neoliberal corporate

culture thrives on control and compliance, making it easier for the few top managers to

direct operations. In building a culture driven for excellence, the CSAO establishes a

standard that is difficult, or impossible, to achieve, making staff members feel

overwhelmed and inferior. These feelings lead to staff members finding ways to please

the CSAO, including unconsciously accepting all priorities and approaches of the CSAO.

The greater level of fear in an organization, the easier it is for leaders to implement

unopposed or unevaluated initiatives. Therefore, part of the reason there is very limited

evidence of staff members examining or criticizing any assessment directive, approach,

or action is the division of student affairs excellence culture; this culture shuts down

creativity, thoughtfulness, and initiative while rewarding compliance. It also rewards

being more in-touch with the needs of the CSAO than the needs of students…or society.

How Manresa's CSAO defines excellence is critical to how his staff work to

achieve excellence. Manresa' leadership, or management, has a strong presence and has

significantly altered the status and trajectory of the institution to a path of success and

excellence. Like all businesses, colleges and universities must be financially viable to

operate and achieve their missions. Manresa's leadership team works to keep the doors

open and the mission alive through their commitment to excellence and growing in size

and reputation. While a quality education is a piece of being excellent, as defined by the

CSAO and other institutional leaders, the economic reality and pressures to characterize

excellence in terms of being number one drives the institution and all its efforts. Resource

and reputational excellence, as defined by Astin and Antonio (2012), reflect the

prevailing views of the CSAO, which align with the corporate culture concept. Evidence

of this approach to excellence is seen in the primary reason assessment is a priority

within the division: other institutions with great reputations and seen as excellent conduct

assessment. Conducting assessment simply to check off activities conducted by aspirant

institutions does not lead to quality assessment practices that honor student learning and

specific institutional values or engage staff members in work that matters. Excellence

dictated by competition, consumerism, and status over individualization and collective

purpose are symptomatic of neoliberal ideals and dangerous because the efforts to be

excellent could separate institutional practice from achievement of institutional mission.

Assessments, or evaluations, will be conducted in this model because adherence to rules

and standards set up leadership are prioritized, but these actions will not lead to

investment in the work by staff members. Work becomes devoid of value and purpose

when it is communicated and received as tasks to complete, not learning to be explored

and enhanced.

   Autonomous agents and excellence. My theoretical analysis of the Excellence

theme through the lens of the autonomous agents concept, leads to one important

conclusion. Autonomous agents, people in non-neoliberal terms, believe they have great

control over their lives, but only their lives; influence, positive or negative, on others is

minimal, unless it comes from corporations. The element of belief in independence in this

scenario is actually an invisible cage that cuts them off from understanding and

challenging system of oppression; fault of not achieving is only the fault of the

individual, not society. As such, staff members within the division of student affairs are

set as autonomous agents of assessment and must fend for themselves in conducting the

work. This conclusion is evidenced by association of failure in the greater success of

assessment within the division, the "just do it" mentality, and the burden Assessment

Committee staff members feel to conduct assessment.

   In the recognition that there is a "growing" culture of assessment within the

division of student affairs at Manresa, that is assumed to be a collective effort, much of

the reason or blame for not being further along falls to individuals. A few staff members

address or allude to individuals or groups of individuals who are essentially dead weight

in the division's effort to prioritize assessment. From departments who they believe are

not capable to do assessment work to individuals who will not get on board, reasons for

not having a stronger culture of assessment, as currently defined at Manresa, are the fault

of individuals within the organization not anything the organization has or has not done.

Several staff members measure the strength of the culture of assessment by the number of

staff members they believe do or buy in to assessment, not the collective sum of work or

attitude. The idea of isolation emerges from this reality and is furthered by the "just do it"

mentality pushed in the division and the responsibility individual members of the

Assessment Committee feel to carry their department's assessment efforts. Establishing a

"just do it" rhetoric in the division shifts the responsibility of the division continually

preparing, teaching, guiding, and supporting assessment efforts to the individual staff

members. In this light, assessment is seen as only something individual staff members

can, and should, do. This feeling is amplified for Assessment Committee members as the

rest of their department assumes the committee member is taking care of everything for

them and the department. Stephanie shares her reflection on the burden she carries as a

committee member:

> …there needs to be a better partnership, because I think that's what was missing
> in my experience this year. For whatever reason, whether it was because I didn't
> ask enough questions for clarification at the beginning of the year, but I think
> looking back at the semester, I felt pretty alone in the experience. I felt like it was
> my responsibility.

The Assessment Committee gives the perception that assessment is a joint and shared

effort within the division, but the reality is that it is a cover for individual responsibility

and burden that causes staff to feel and act in isolation. Individuals carry the guilt of

minimal or poor assessment activity in the division, which is the intent and result of

creating autonomous agents, so the collective organization can continue to direct and mandate. This is a temporary and unsustainable approach to building a culture of assessment. While individual action and work is required to conduct assessment, the responsibility for leading and sustaining the effort must be a collective effort and responsibility for it to be acculturated; falling on individual shoulders is not the answer.

Resistance

The final theme is resistance, specifically resistance to assessment and resistance to accountability by members of the division of student affairs staff members. Assessment is still considered a recent trend by numerous student affairs educators, and, regardless of the reason, there is a consistent and strong resistance among student affairs educators to engage in assessment of student learning and development. Evidence in my data sheds light on this topic, particularly though defining and analyzing the resistance to assessment and accountability separately. In this section, I describe how staff members resist assessment through devaluing and delaying the work, resist imposed accountability, and reinterpret the theme of resistance through neoliberal concepts, specifically autonomous agents and blame.

> **Resistance to assessment: Assessment as an afterthought.** Countless members of the division of student affairs staff express the same sentiment on the role of assessment of student learning and development, which, in and of itself, is beneficial, and the overwhelming sentiment of assessment as important, vital, crucial, and good practice, which is even more impressive. At the program level, where most assessment within the division happens, staff members also have a common understanding that assessment can help staff decide if they should keep hosting the program, improve it, or cut it. Because

the division is in a large growth phase, in all aspects, including facilities, programs, and

staff, many staff members cling to the "keep, improve, or cut" concept in hopes they can

remove one duty from their packed plates, even though I never heard a story about a

program that was cut. Further, when asked about specific assessment activities or results,

staff members speak in generalities about what assessment can do, about informal

reflection activities they engage in, or list several program evaluation surveys they

completed on their programs. So while staff members acknowledge the value and

importance of assessment, they are not engaging in the work. A couple of sub-themes

emerged in the data that support the notion assessment is not being conducted

systematically and systemically, including a belief that assessment is not their work, the

feeling of limited or no time available to assess, and lack of assessment knowledge.

Assessment is not our work. The most common way Manresa's student affairs

staff members resist assessment is through devaluing it and establishing it as something

outside of their duties, an add-on. Separating assessment work from all other job duties

provides a made-up, yet somehow legitimate, excuse or reason to why they are not

conducting assessments. Tara, like many of her colleagues, sees assessment of student

learning and development as an independent function or functioning of her work and

believes it takes a different skill set or mentality to engage in assessment. Tara says,

> People get into this work [student affairs] because they're passionate about the
> work and assessment is completely different type of work or mindset or mind
> function than student affairs or campus recreation, athletics or what have you.
> You can look at it that people don't have the best of intentions, but I don't know if
> their mind or their passion area aligns with assessment work.

Tara says a completely different skill set or interest is needed to conduct assessment than

to do any other part of staff members' existing positions. Further, she alludes that

assessment should be its own functional area or department within student affairs because of how different the work is than any other work within the field and the level of disinterest by staff members. Andrew further distances assessment as an element of the work of student affairs educators in saying student affairs educators did not grow up wanting to do assessment nor do people enter the profession for that reason. He believes there is no kid sharing that he wants to be an assessment specialist in student development in kindergarten when other kids are talking about being police officers or firefighters. Most staff members see nothing desirable about conducting assessment of student learning and development, even though they say it is valuable. Ultimately they want someone else to do it as it is not the work they chose to do or see as aligned with the philosophy of student affairs.

Taking it one step further, staff members see assessment work as taking them away from the direct contact and interaction with students, the main reason they entered the profession and one of the most critical responsibilities of their positions. Staff default to fulfilling the functional area requirements of their position and believe they need special permission or approval to address the "additional" assessment responsibility in their job description. Therefore, the only time assessment activities are conducted or reported is when information on department assessment results are needed for the division's annual report or when other data or reports are requested of them, usually by the CSAO. David went as far to say that department directors or the vice president could direct staff to stop doing their traditional job to focus on assessment and the more reflective aspects of their positions for a set period of time to encourage more assessment activities.

> So to see it be more successful is—this may not even be possible, per se—but is to have our vice president or our director say, "Hey, today we don't want you to work. We just want to spend the day doing this or spend the afternoon doing this," giving us that kind of breathing room to be creative with our thinking.

While David's idea might be a good first step for addressing concerns about time, it perpetuates the misunderstanding that assessment of student learning and development is a separate or distinct action when it should be incorporated into other activities.

No spare time. Demands on staff time are many at Manresa. I observed on several occasions that time is a sensitive issue for staff members in the division. The topic of quality over quantity in programs and services was also brought up several times by staff during the summer strategic planning retreat. Some staff were mindful to say during the strategic planning brainstorming process that they want to advance the division and the work they are doing for students, but to do so as more is added to people's plates, other items must be removed. In addition, during assessment committee meetings the committee chair was highly conscientious about the amount of time members spend on committee-related tasks and meetings; she does not want to take up any more time than is needed. Her attentiveness to committee members' time stands out because she was neither responding to vocalized concerns within the meetings nor did I perceive she was addressing concerns offered outside of meetings. I see her as responding to a greater feeling of being overworked within the division. In interviews, staff members also address how busy their jobs are and their concerns for fitting everything into their schedules. Bottom line, Manresa student affairs staff members feel they do not have any spare time.

Staff members feel great pressure to do as much as they possibly can and little

permission to remove a responsibility or program when they take on a new one. They feel

there is little or no time to spare to engage in assessment of student learning and

development. Furthermore, they do not prioritize assessment as an essential or required

responsibility. David points out that everything gets done before assessment; "All of us

have 10,000 other things that we need to do, so that gets bumped up in front of

assessment, for better or for worse." Tara adds,

> We are all pressed and stressed—stretched for time and don't have enough time to do things we perceive as having the most impact. I think the assessment is one of those things that sometimes gets sort of put off or "when I get to it" kind of thing.

Tara establishes that assessment is not a priority and does not have significant perceived

impact on the work being done. Jim shares a similar opinion,

> Certainly there's the practical challenge of just finding the time and the energy. And it's that way with everything, but I think it's tempting to put assessment kind of on the back burner as other programmatic needs are getting so much time and energy that it's tempting to kind of give that a lower priority. And I think that's a dangerous tendency to do that because it's all too easy to forget it and all too easy to once you've done assessment not to use the results.

At every turn staff members believe there is not enough time to complete assessments,

whether they really do not have the time or do not consider it a priority and/or possess the

knowledge or expertise. Even if they have the time and have completed collection of

data, they do not prioritize time to analyze or use the results. If they are not completing

assessment projects, it is impossible to see, literally and figuratively, the value or benefit

of the work, because they do not get that far. I agree staff members are busy, as it is the

nature of the profession, but I disagree with why they are not assessing. First, as

addressed earlier, their current assessment practices are not founded in educational

mission and values, resulting in poor assessment practices. Second, if they truly understood and cared about assessing like they say they do, they would make the time to do it. However, being busy is a socially acceptable reason for not conducting assessment at Manresa. In addition, it is hard for others to see if a staff member is conducting assessment or not because they have made it an individual and private process, while it is easy to see if they are not hosting career fairs for seniors. There is less priority and status associated with completing seemingly "invisible" tasks, like assessment. In addition to not prioritizing assessment, many staff members do not know how to assess which makes them even less inclined to do the work.

  Lack of knowledge or lack of interest? There are major challenges to engage in and prioritize assessment of student learning and development, and many staff members at Manresa struggle to conduct assessment of student learning and development because they say they lack the knowledge and expertise. Without the needed expertise or confidence to conduct assessment of student learning and development, staff members do not think twice about placing assessment on the back burner. It takes a lot longer to do assessment when you have to learn as you go, there is not time to learn, and the resources are sparse and insufficient. And, importantly, this is happening in an "it is okay to fail," "just do it" culture, which permits minimal effort. Shandice, an assistant/associate director, offers, "People don't know where to begin a lot of the times, and see it as very daunting and just say, 'Oh, forget it,' because they don't feel like they can do it." However, while staff members share that it is their lack of knowledge that makes it hard to do assessment, their lack of interest is the more plausible reason.

Harper (2014) says there is a general acceptance in higher education for staff members who acknowledge their knowledge or experience shortcomings as a reasonable excuse for not doing something or doing it well. It is more acceptable to say you do not know something than you do not have an interest in doing it, which seems backwards. Yet, if the interest is there, the knowledge and action should follow, right? No. The staff members I asked about their interest and knowledge levels of assessment of student learning and development overwhelmingly rated their interest higher than their knowledge of assessment. But those same staff members do not indicate they attended non-required assessment trainings or educational sessions nor that they learned much from the sessions they did attend. While it is possible the sessions they attend cover assessment content they already know, they could be using lack of knowledge and experience as an acceptable excuse.

Several staff members offer their conflicting thoughts and actions related to assessing their work; they experience an internal battle to assess or not, even with relatively high interest and knowledge of assessment. Thomas recognizes the value and contributions assessment of student learning and development can have on efficiency and efficacy of his work, but he struggles to justify the times and resources needed to alter his approach to work with an assessment focused mindset. Thomas states,

> Sometimes I think that it's hard to make time to do assessment well because of that go, go, go—do more, do more sort of message that we've received so loudly and clearly in the past. Not to try and make you know come off as a whiner or anything like that, but you know we're all working really hard and it's absolutely critical that work be assessed so that we're not working hard for no reason, but assessment takes time and it takes intentionality and it takes resources being dedicated to it and us being able to slow down sometimes and say all right let's do this in the right way.

Thomas captures the greater issues of assessment within the division, perhaps without realizing it. First, he acknowledges the great pressure and focus within the division to produce and do more. The division of student affairs wants quantity over quality, for success is defined by how much one can produce. The business mindset of more is better is pervasive in the division. Second, he simply sees it from his perspective and that he is the only one dealing with these thoughts and concerns and assumes others are not. Part of the reason staff struggle with assessment in Manresa's division of student affairs is because their efforts are fragmented: they are doing it alone. The responsibility of truly understanding and engaging in assessment is relegated to individual staff members; the CSAO does not take ownership of it nor is there a collaborative effort to understand assessment. The focus is just on doing something in the way of capturing data to make the division look good. All of Thomas' thoughts taken together begin more clearly to define the challenges of assessment for the division. Survival of the fittest, or the most excellent, is standard operating procedure, and collaboration and thoughtfulness in approach to work are not valued. Assessment will not exist in this environment. The organizational culture is not conducive to assessment; resistance to assessment is pervasive and deep within the division, even though no one admits it.

Not only does the culture of the division not lend itself to create a culture of assessment, the approach of assessment training and capacity building is doing nothing to change the culture. Again, Thomas captures the scenario well. Thomas wisely describes his struggles with assessment.

> Assessment is a challenging thing to do—to do well I should say. Anyone can ask you Likert scale questions or you know how do you feel that this, do you like this basically or do you as a student who participated in this intervention think that

this worked? You know those are all easy questions to ask, but they really only get to the surface of what people's perceptions are. To find out if there's actually that intervention that actually made a difference you have to ask more strategic questions. You have to do pre and posttest kind of analysis. You have to look at actual behavior and from our perspective we're looking at behavior—we're trying to assess behavior and changes to behavior and changes to attitude. So attitude we can ask about, because students will tell us. But behavior is something they might say one thing or have a perception of their behavior that's one way, but their actual behavior may be very different. So hopefully that makes sense, but if we're trying to find out whether your drinking patterns have changed since getting in trouble and if the conduct process was the cause of that change those are difficult questions to get at unless you really take a really methodical approach and have you know test groups and things like that. It's near impossible to do with the level of expertise that the average administrator has, myself included, and with the limited resources that we have available.

Thomas addresses many of the challenging questions that accompany conducting assessment, which can slow or halt student affairs educators' ability to complete assessment projects. One-hour trainings or webinars on how to write student learning outcomes or design a survey, default training topics, are wholly ineffective in helping staff members with their real assessment questions and qualms about their knowledge of assessment, not addressing any of the challenging questions that Thomas raises. Thomas acknowledges how assessment is capable of helping him in his job demonstrating his general understanding of the topic, but he does not possess, like the majority of his colleagues, the needed knowledge and skills to engage in the work. To capitalize and build on the interest of staff members, like Thomas, division leadership and assessment committees must themselves explore assessment more thoughtfully to provide useful professional development opportunities and support staff as they complete assessment projects. Interest, perhaps better defined as ownership, and knowledge of assessment are essential components of the equation that must begin with leaders in the organization for other staff members to follow suit.

Resistance to accountability. Considering the extensive resistance to assessment among Manresa's division of student affairs staff members, there is minimal resistance to accountability, at least direct or vocalized resistance. Resistance to accountability is evident in comments about fearing "assessment" and the desire to hire a fulltime director of assessment. In this section I also note a contradiction in how a few staff members respond positively to assessment in Acceptance of Accountability. For the purposes of this theme, resistance to accountability is defined as seeking to avoid blame. Traditionally, resistance to accountability is seen positively in the eyes of educators because it demonstrates a valuing of education and its contributions to society and a devaluing of the potentially uninformed public. But there is minimal data from my time at Manresa to demonstrate opposition to the public at large; their resistance is internal. Division of student affairs staff members resist being accountable to the CSAO for assessment. As such, I analyze their opposition to understand the opposition and its effects on assessment within the division.

Fear of "assessment," a.k.a. accountability. There is not a sentiment of general opposition to accountability at Manresa. The majority of staff members do not mention or display concern with accountability because they believe it is synonymous with assessment. The staff members adopt and recite the division mantra of "assessment is a priority and central to our work," which discourages staff from evaluating their actions or understanding of issues and simply do what is asked of them regarding assessment and accountability. The intertwining of assessment and accountability rhetoric in the division make it nearly impossible to separate where or to what resistance is tied. However, I analyze the fear of "assessment" as fear of accountability because staff members' fear is

associated with judgment and standards, not learning; the fear and resistance staff feel

comes in being accountable. Spike speaks to the fear people have of doing assessment,

"what if my stuff shows you that is wasn't a good idea…. They're afraid of being wrong.

They're afraid of being stupid." Because external evaluation is associated with

accountability, staff members fear judgment and critique as people and professionals, not

necessarily on the effect of their work. Therefore, while staff members use assessment as

the term in the context of fear, they are actually speaking of accountability.

Resistance to accountability is primarily unseen within Manresa's division of

student affairs, but it exists. Resistance to accountability is demonstrated in staff

members' desire to avoid blame. The absence of work and communication regarding

accountability is telling. When it comes to conducting assessment and evaluation of

programs and services in the division, no one knows what anyone else is doing, besides

members of the Assessment Committee being familiar with the required assessments of

other members and the CSAO's leadership team receiving assessment results for reports.

It is unclear if staff members fear being exposed as ineffective or if they are intentionally

resistant to accountability efforts; regardless, negligible information is shared among

colleagues to minimize exposure to being blamed for anything. The void in

communication about assessment demonstrates resistance to accountability. When no, or

little, energy is spent on an issue or topic, the people or the system is being resistant to it.

In the case of Manresa, their resistance to accountability appears unintentional

and subconscious. Staff members comment they would like to see more communication

among and between departments within the division regarding assessment. Many staff

members share their desire to hear more about assessment projects and findings other

departments are conducting. They appreciate the effort to share tidbits of information about assessment in the regular divisional email, but the level of information provided does not help them to learn more about their students or how improve their programs. There is not an outlet in traditional staff meetings, at the division or department levels, for sharing assessment efforts, challenges, findings, or results. If there was an intentional or planned opposition to accountability efforts, staff members would not draw attention to the lack of communication within the division as they have. Yet, looking more closely at the data, staff members place the responsibility on other staff members and departments to share their assessment data, none of them suggest they had results and findings to share or take ownership for being the first to share their assessment results with others. So while they articulate a desire to learn and hear more about assessment, staff members continue to limit opportunities in which they might be blamed for a failing on their part. Fear of failure is a powerful motivator, and not always for good.

Self-preservation is what drives resistance to accountability among the divisional staff members. They are not only looking out for themselves, as it is very clear staff members care about their students and colleagues, but they likely justify their acts of self-preservation as if they do not keep their jobs they will lose out on the work and relationships they enjoy. Again, I did not find a collective agreement among staff members to resist accountability efforts in the same way, but the sum of the parts creates a blame-averse culture within the division. Andrew describes the motivation for assessment within the division this way:

> So at the same time for us though there's some accountability from up the chain. There's this—we like to believe that we're making our lives just a little bit easier by doing a good job and in order to ensure that we're doing a good job we have

the time to keep tabs on ourselves and make sure that we're assessing, that we're moving in the right direction. So for us it's really two-fold, it's a little self-preservation and then a little bit of up the chain accountability.

Andrew, an assistant/associate director, acknowledges the responsibility to respond to accountability efforts from his supervisor and others "up the chain" as just part of the job, nothing more. What is more concerning is that he views assessment as something to make his life "just a little bit easier" and a tool of oversight that will keep tabs on staff and make sure they are going in the right direction. This association is further evidence of the confusion between assessment and accountability, as assessments are tools for and of learning, not control. Andrew, like other members of the staff, is more concerned about doing "a good job" than quality work. He knows the tasks he needs to accomplish to be a good employee, and that is what he will do.

Hiring a full-time director of assessment. The final element of resistance to accountability is the desire of division staff members to hire a director of assessment for the division. Manresa's division of student affairs' current approach towards conducting assessment of student learning and development is built on an expectation it is everyone's responsibility because they do not have a full-time director of assessment, even if hiring a director is the desire presented by the majority of the staff. The responsibility for assessment should not live with one person or one department because a coordinated, comprehensive, on-going, systematic, and iterative process is what leads to improvements in student learning (AAHE, 1992; Bresciani, 2011; Terenzini, 1989), but hiring a director of assessment for the division of student affairs is commonly recognized as the solution to move assessment to the next level within the division. In and of itself, having a director of assessment for student affairs can be a good decision, but the

addition of this person to the staff cannot and will not address all assessment issues and responsibilities. From the CSAO down to entry-level professionals, members of the division would like to have a director of assessment who supports only the division of student affairs. This is a shortsighted and narrow answer to a bigger issue of integrating assessment into the culture of the division. But, hiring a director of assessment could increase the sentiment of assessment work feeling more like accountability measures because the director could operate independently of the staff and become another "external" individual directing their work. Aside from the management and leadership style of a director of assessment, requesting a director of assessment provides another structural barrier to general staff involvement in assessment efforts and reduces the total time each staff member spends thinking about and conducting assessment, all which push assessment to accountability.

The division of student affairs appears mindful of developing an inclusive and representative culture around assessment of student learning and development that offers ways for staff to be involved. Yet what I discovered in my analysis is staff members who want to be more involved do not know how to contribute beyond the existing structures and the assessment structures provide those who want to avoid the work with cover. The CSAO created an Assessment Committee toward the beginning of his tenure in the position. The committee consists of representatives from every department, and they host assessment training topics during required all-staff, in-service times. All staff members have access to learning more about assessment, and can contribute through committee membership or presenting of trainings. Yet Adrianne made a point to share his thoughts on the need for more or different opportunities for staff involvement in assessment.

> I think there are a good number of folks within the division that appreciate and understand, genuinely enjoy assessment. And I think wanting or would not mind being a resource or helping to support the division's efforts in this area. I don't know if everyone feels like there is a tangible way for them to contribute or to be part of that. And the assessment committee has been perhaps the most visible way of getting plugged in but then I don't know if the structure or its purpose has allowed folks to really do what they would like to do to support those efforts.

Opportunities and structures for staff members to engage in assessment within the division of student affairs direct their involvement, but the direction is set up by the CSAO and those he hand-selects to lead the efforts. I initially saw these structures as positive steps to encourage and facilitate assessment efforts throughout the division, as literature encourages creating a committee as one of the first steps to building assessment in an area (Green et al., 2008). But upon further analysis these structures can limit and control which staff members are involved as well as how and why they gather and fulfill the functions. As Adrianne points out, there are people who want to engage in assessment (of student learning) but do not feel the existing opportunities, perhaps culture, and structure or goals of the committee align with how they can contribute. Opposition to the CSAO's plan and vision for accountability masked as assessment is hard to challenge because the staff members who would do so are strategically not included in current structures or feel the freedom to develop other initiatives. Connecting back to the excellence narrative and theme, resistance clashes with the division's culture of excellence; compliance, not resistance, is appreciated. If a director of assessment is hired everything would continue to operate as it does now because the CSAO will hire someone who aligns with his thinking and there would likely be limited new opportunities for staff members to join new initiatives as a director could individually handle new tasks. Based on current operations, a director of assessment would reduce

contributions of other staff members in assessment work and minimize staff members'
ability to resist the prevalence of blame linked to accountability.

Another limitation of the current assessment structures in place is that staff
members are allowed to redirect or cover their lack of contribution, avoiding any possible
blame. Non-assessment committee staff members share information regarding the
committee as if they are members; they demonstrate their support of assessment by
sharing the work of others as if it were their own when needed or convenient. They
deflect their personal lack of assessment work or contributions in sharing what is
collectively being done in the division. Many staff members listed professional
development trainings offered over the years as if they attended all of them when they
only attended the required all-division sessions. On the other side, while there is no
evidence of this in my data, in not being an actual member of the Assessment Committee
they also escape any issues or blame the committee might receive in fulfilling its duties.
When accountability drives assessment efforts, staff members find ways to navigate the
system to minimize their work and preserve their standing and position within the
organization because accountability is void of meaning and content as well as does not
connect to the heart of student affairs work. Development of an inclusive culture in
assessment is important because it allows staff members to feel included and validated in
their contributions, capabilities, and efforts in the overall process and effort, and this is
not happening in the division.

Acceptance of accountability. A couple of staff members and departments at
Manresa embrace accountability efforts in their professions because it is common
practice. They view accountability as meeting, and ideally exceeding, standard

expectations, not as extraneous judgment or criteria placed on them by uninformed external parties, which can be the sentiment towards other calls for accountability, but from reliable experts. In all of my data, only two staff members, an athletic coach and a member of the wellness staff, address accountability without a negative tone; honestly, they believe there is value in accountability. However, they narrowly define accountability to meeting standard or expectations that are reasonable, and sometimes needed; there is values-alignment for them. Unlike other areas of student affairs, athletics' and wellness' work and evaluation are public information. At any given time, information about coaches' records, players, and credentials can be found in newspapers and online. Documentation of wellness staff members', which includes doctors, nurses, and psychologists, records are not public information due to appropriate regulations, but they are carefully reviewed by colleagues and are accountable to standards of their profession and the health of their patients. Because of the risks associated with the medical profession, it is clear why accountability is central to their work, but the level of accountability in athletics is less obvious.

Athletics is rarely a matter of life and death, in terms of results and scores, but sports are taken very seriously in U.S. culture, particularly collegiate athletics. The status of athletics leads to great public monitoring and demands for accountability. As an example, one of Manresa's coaches shares details about the daily pressure he feels to be accountable for his job. Coach Allen says:

> There are a million jobs in this country that people can slug through every day and not be accountable…for where it's very easy to go to the [athletics] website and see how the team did this past year with our win/loss record. And I feel that pressure; that I'm accountable every game we play, every practice we run.

This level of responsibility and pressure drives how Allen approaches his work and the

standards he sets for himself and others. While learning is a central part of his work and a

key to success, he frames assessment as accountability. Coach shares:

> I don't avoid it [assessment] because there's a common word that I have used
> since we've been talking…it is the accountability of it. That's whether it's myself,
> whether it's my assistant coaches, whether it's the players, whether it's our
> recruits coming in, there's a certain standard we set in a way for expectations of
> how we expect them to act, what they're expected to do once they're here. So I
> embrace it.

He also believes that he, and athletics, embraces assessment more than other departments

in student affairs and the university as a whole; assessment is an element of the sports

equation. Coach Allen adds:

> I don't think it's [assessment] new in the sports realm. And when we fall under
> the Department of Student Development now. I think for a lot of those people in
> whether it's Admission or Housing or something like that, the assessment part is
> maybe new to them. Where in athletics, it's what we do every day. We're always
> assessing our players, our recruits, our coaching staffs. So I think it's the new
> buzz word in Department of Student Development. But for athletics, it's what we
> do almost every day.

Word choice is this quotation demonstrates how assessment related words are used

interchangeably or differently by each person or in professional terminology. While

coach is using the word assess, he is describing the evaluation of his team, and

accountability is associated with expectations, both set by him and others. Beyond

varying definitions, coach's comments demonstrate how blame is not avoided in

athletics; it is part of the job. Similar to health and wellness careers, athletics' staff

members own the responsibility and accountability associated with their jobs. Owning

accountability diminishes the power blame, or the fear of being blamed, has in

controlling their action, unlike other student affairs educators who resist and deflect

accountability. Wellness and athletics staff members possess a greater sense of freedom and ownership in their work because they have addressed the issues of power, blame, and control that come with being accountable. Establishing this freedom for and among all student affairs staff is important because it can actively diminish the effect of the neoliberal enterprise but acknowledging where accountability forces are coming from and deciding which to adhere to. It is more of a blind process outside of athletics and wellness to define accountability standards and practices, which makes it a moving target and one that might not be the proper end target.

Reinterpretation of Resistance

Beyond the obvious consequences of student affairs educators resisting assessment and accountability, like minimal assessment activity on college campuses, the reinterpretation of the resistance theme through neoliberalism reveals critical hurdles facing the enculturation of assessment of student learning and development in the work of student affairs educators. The feeling of isolation and sole responsibility by individual staff members to conduct all assessments of their programs and departments is stifling actual assessment of student learning and development work, which is an intentional feeling developed in the neoliberal economy. The neoliberal economy is directing the path of higher education by directing related rhetoric and media communications and through corporations and politicians creating a belief that education is in a state of crisis. The neoliberal concepts of autonomous agents and blame as a tool of control more clearly define this reality.

Autonomous agents and resistance. In light of the neoliberal concept of autonomous agents, the second layer of analysis I conducted I offer four conclusions

about the role of CSAOs and individual student affairs educators in conducting

assessment and creating a culture of assessment. First, CSAOs have more and less power

than they recognize in how assessment is understood, viewed, and conducted as they do

not fully understand the power that governs assessment. Second, accountability efforts

thrive on individual members of the higher education community believing they cannot

look to others, for anything related to assessment. Third, individual members of the

education community, including student affairs educators, do not challenge assessment

and accountability because they feel isolated in the work. The sum of these conclusions

leads to the final, the power and isolation associated with assessment prevents assessment

from being effective and meaningful practice because there is not a collective effort and

contributions are not coordinated and realized. The autonomous agent concept

illuminates how little control student affairs educators and divisions of student affairs, as

a group of individuals, have in conducting assessment of student learning and

development as well as why creating a culture of assessment within a division of student

affairs is a significant challenge.

An interesting dynamic exists between the perceived and actual intentionality and

power in the CSAO's establishment of assessment as a priority for the division.

Manresa's CSAO possesses more power than he believes in leading assessment within

the division because of the general acceptance of staff members to not challenge

priorities and initiatives of management, influenced by his excellence narrative and

standard. As autonomous agents, individuals are to make the best of what they have and

accept the guidance and direction of management without question. Individuals do not

have permission to challenge anyone but themselves, and must shoulder their workload

and status alone, which leads to no time to challenge inequity or abuse of power. Conversely, what the CSAO and others do not recognize is how little control the CSAO actually has over how assessment data and results are used. Just as members of the division of student affairs staff are autonomous agents, so is the CSAO. The position of the CSAO is not high enough in the larger structure of the institution to control the overall conversations on assessment of education, even though he and his staff believe he is influential. The CSAO can interpret and challenge the greater accountability focus in his area, but he still must respond to the external agents dictating what is important for Manresa to communicate through its assessment efforts. Further, Manresa's CSAO does not challenge the current accountability rhetoric and did not include a theoretical or philosophical approach in the technical and structural implementation of assessment practices within the division. Dr. Alex's lack of power is evidenced in his ultimate plan for how assessment data can be used is to validate the work of student affairs, obtain resources, and simply say it is a part of his operations to validate his leadership and organization. He does not mention benefit to students associated with effective assessment practice; he, as an autonomous agent, is more concerned with adherence to external than internal standards.

Second, as alluded to in the first conclusion, the success and growth of the neoliberal economy comes with individuals being individuals, not a member of a group or community (Giroux, 2014), which is seen in the individual approach to assessment efforts within the division of student affairs. Individuals, unlike groups and communities, do not pose a threat to large corporations; thus corporations work to improve their odds of maintaining power by dismantling communities into autonomous agents (Giroux,

2014). In this type of environment, talking with others, getting support, offering support, and sharing information are signs of weakness. Individuals, autonomous agents, must be responsible for their lives and contributions as well as be mindful to not help others as they are competitors in wealth acquisition. These neoliberal messages shift student affairs educators into doing their best alone and working to stay ahead of others. This dynamic is a significant barrier to creating an organization that works together in assessing student learning and development because individual staff members and departments are focused on their contributions, not collective projects or supporting other's work. For example, during Assessment Committee meetings each member would share updates on his/her assessment project with occasional questions or offering of advice from the chair and another member, but it was clear that no one was going to help another department with their project. The feeling of isolation is exemplified by the lack of support some committee members felt from their supervisor and department. From the outside, an assessment committee represents a communal approach to assessment, but in reality there are minimal communal, supportive functions or aspects to the group. Instead of banning together to learn and conduct assessment, staff members *chose* to take responsibility for their piece and hope to distract attention to those who they believe are not as far along as they are when attention comes their way.

A third outcome of this individual approach to assessment is there is limited time, energy, or support to resist any assessment initiative, or assessment as a whole. When a function as large and public as assessment is required of staff members, there is little belief that they have the ability or right to challenge it. This hurdle is further exacerbated when individuals, not teams or groups, are engaging in the work. When groups discuss

and plan projects and initiatives, there is time and space to analyze aspects of the initiative and debate or address concerns. It is also easier to navigate concerns as a member of a group because there is less risk and fear than fighting the battle on your own. Individuals are also more overwhelmed to find the time to address the issue as they have a tight schedule to begin with. I heard repeated concerns from staff members about their lack of time to complete job duties without adding assessment initiatives to the list. Lack of time is the most common reason staff members are not conducting assessment, or more than what is required. When structures, systems, and initiatives are individual, not group or community, focused and run, they are drastically more likely to go unchallenged; allowing power to stay with those who direct and mandate from the top. The implications of limited time for staff members to think about their work are serious, both in the short and long-term; change will not come from the inside if time is not allocated appropriately.

In conclusion, the top-down, corporate-driven calls for accountability thrive when individuals feel the weight of the work, operate in isolation, and do not analyze the work, all which are represented at Manresa. A neoliberal driven education system and accountability plans are a scary reality for the future of assessment, student affairs, and higher education. If time and attention is not given to finding ways to build community, synergy, and analysis into the operations and time of student affairs educators, they will never direct their own assessment efforts or direct their future. The neoliberal economy is steadily chipping away at education and will soon make its way through the wall unless higher education takes charge of its future and stands by its values of democracy and collective action to challenge the current path and reverse it.

Blame and resistance. There are several perspectives or layers to how the neoliberal concept of blame can be used to expand the Resistance theme. Blame occurs between many entities for various reasons in assessment and accountability efforts in the context of Manresa, which can be extrapolated to other institutions and society. Two key conclusions of my analysis of resistance through blame are: (a) people work hard to displace or redirect responsibility to avoid blame, and (b) blame is an influential tool for unchallenged acquisition of power or control. Blame is a powerful tool that must be named and exposed before assessment of student learning and development can be realized.

One way blame gets its power is through people's desire to avoid it. Blame has negative connotations and most people prefer to avoid being blamed, especially if they do not have a role, or a large role, in the decision/action. The staff members in the division of student affairs at Manresa attempt to displace or avoid their responsibility to engage in assessment by attempting to remove the responsibility from their plate or minimize it as not equal to their other responsibilities. Creating distance between themselves and assessment is a way to shift the responsibility of assessment off their plate, which results in them being free from blame for anything that does or does not happen in terms of assessment. Another major way staff members hope to avoid blame related to assessment is by encouraging the hiring of a new director of assessment for the division. Having an assessment staff member to delegate and direct all assessment efforts to and through removes the greater burden of assessment from individual staff members. It also gives staff members an out in the instance of blame being directed their way, as they can still point back to poor guidance or instruction provided by the director of assessment.

Intentional or not, staff members are using the tactic of blame, somewhat successfully, to protect themselves, as blame is typically used by those in power to control those below them. Traditionally, blame is a tactic used to shift responsibility and burden to individual faults away from systemic or societal inequities that create unfair conditions for some individuals while benefiting others. While it could be argued staff members are attempting to use the concept of blame to benefit themselves while harming others, they are using the system to deflect or oppose the system. They are attempting to remove themselves from the blame cycle.

In the division of student affairs, the responsibility to conduct assessment projects does fall to individual staff members, mostly members of the Assessment Committee, but blame for the division not being further along is relegated to the few people and departments in the division who are perceived as the major challengers of assessment; most individuals are blame free. Luckily for individual staff members, the strategy of displacing and avoiding blame through minimizing responsibility for assessment is currently working. Perhaps the CSAO and his leadership team do not know enough about assessment or what is happening within the division of student affairs related to assessment to be able to direct or monitor what is happening and direct blame accordingly or the CSAO is spending his time attempting to avoid blame by those he is accountable to, but for now only a few staff members in the division feel responsible for assessment and it does not appear that will change any time soon.

On a large social scale, the blame placed on higher education for its failings—significant increase in tuition, massive student loan debt, sexual assaults on campus, ill-prepared workforce, just to name a few covered in media—is where the neoliberal

economy gains its power to impose demands and infiltrate values of higher education.

And its power is strengthened when higher education resists the conversation and does

not offer contradictory data or evidence. While there are legitimate concerns related to

these topics, the "facts" presented do not traditionally provide the entire picture, and

higher education faculty and staff have a difficult time getting data or air space to provide

the missing pieces. In his recent review and critique of the movie, *Ivory Tower*,

Deresiewicz (2014) addresses concerns about the "poor" investment that people believe

higher education has become:

> The job market for recent graduates is undoubtedly tough, but it is very far from "miserable," as someone in the movie is allowed to say. In fact, the higher you go up the educational ladder, the less severe the economic downturn has been. As of April, the unemployment rate for college graduates ages 25 to 34 was 3 percent. The wage premium for people with bachelor's degrees has been rising steadily since 1980 and now stands at 98 percent relative to those who have only finished high school—a difference, as the movie notes, that amounts to nearly an extra million dollars in median lifetime earnings. College is not only still a good investment; it is the best investment you can make. (p. B8)

Higher education, including student affairs, must respond to concerns of accountability

presented by neoliberalists, not just to deflect their use of blame as a strategy of control,

but to break free from the cycle of blame and redirect the conversation to higher

education's place in a democracy. Manresa's CSAO is playing their game and attempting

to avoid blame through providing accountability data instead of changing the game by

proactively providing data and assessment about the effectiveness of their programs and

the quality of learning taking place in his division. The CSAO is also falling victim to the

individual responsibility aspect of blame by setting up the division to be at the top, by

itself, instead of working with his colleagues who are engaging in effective assessment

practices to collectively combat the blame placed on them. Continuing to do assessment alone is not helpful for anyone.

Summary

"Preparing people to lead extraordinary lives." Manresa's promise as well as its values and mission fly in the face of everything the neoliberal economy epitomizes. Yet, many neoliberal principles or practices are in operation at Manresa, largely to the surprise of the entire staff. Neoliberal concepts and principles are secretly, subversively, and slowly are infiltrating Manresa through assessment efforts, leadership of the institution, and resistance of staff members to conduct assessment, not because of philosophical concerns but individual concerns about time and authority.

> …the problems with American schools cannot be reduced to matters of accountability or cost-effectiveness. Nor can the solutions to such problems be reduced to the spheres of management and economics. The problems of higher education and public schooling must be addressed in the realms of values and politics, while engaging critically the most fundamental beliefs Americans have as a nation regarding the mean and purpose of education and its relationship to democracy. (Giroux, 1999, pp. 154-155)

Manresa must review, analyze, and correct its assessment goals, plans, structures, and actions to fulfill its promise to students, develop a culture within the division of student affairs that values assessing of student learning and development, and realize the purpose of higher education.

CHAPTER V

FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Since the founding of U.S. institutions of higher learning, colleges and

universities have existed to support economic, intellectual, democratic, and societal needs

of their communities (Cohen, 1998; Thelin, 2004). These needs can work in unison to

direct the efforts of institutions, but they can also contradict or challenge one another. My

interpretivist case study research began with seeking to understand and describing how

Manresa University's division of student affairs is building a culture of assessment, but

through my analysis new light is shed on the implications and influence our economy and

society have on assessment and accountability of higher education and student affairs.

Assessment of student learning and development within student affairs literature is seen

as a skill set to learn and a set of concepts to understand, not a practice of daily

operations situated in a broad social milieu where values are enacted. Specifically, in

light of Angelo's (1999) discussion of assessment as an issue of human will, not just a

technical skill, I sought to add research to the limited scholarship on the adaptive side of

assessment, as seen in student affairs educators' commitments to improvement and

collective efforts to create a culture that values assessment of student learning and

development, to aid in the advancement of assessment. Yet what I discovered is that my

research question was part of the larger issues in creating a culture of assessment. I

assumed building a culture of assessment was a needed and desirable initiative that would

advance the work and mission of student affairs and the institutions they are housed in, but what I find is that my assumptions did not capture the complexity of assessment in context. In this chapter, I provide four key findings of my study, implications, recommendations for future practice and study, and a conclusion.

Findings

Engaging in assessment is an incredible undertaking because of the complexity, scope, size, and time needed to work through the myriad of theoretical and practical components and questions as well as to align goals and values to support the institution's mission. Yet, what is more pressing and important is taking a step back from those technical challenges to truly understand assessment as a concept, process, and source of power to ensure it is beneficial. There is much to learn from Manresa University's division of student affairs as a case; analyzing and interpreting Manresa's data lead to four significant findings about assessment and its purpose. First, student affairs must be resistant to assessment forces that do not align with institutional and professional values and missions. Beyond the American Association for Higher Education's (1992) recommendation that assessment begins with educational values, they must be the backbone of assessment. Second, student affairs educators must focus upon the good work they are doing with students and use it as a guidepost for assessment. Assessment is a discourse about learning, development, values, and the intentions of staff to support students as individuals realizing their gifts, not cogs in a credentialing machine, is important work. Third, the CSAO is responsible for taking a critical look at broader factors that affect education and student affairs to ensure decisions and actions of the division honor and utilize assessment of student learning and development to maximize

institutional mission and student learning. Last, transforming assessment of student learning and development away from the current accountability focused mentality and rhetoric is a major and momentous undertaking, but a highly important task.

Value as Backbone

Value as the backbone of assessment is a critical finding of my study because of the minimal conversation and dialogue that exists about values incongruence in assessment and accountability. Scholars identify accountability as a major driver of assessment, but they do not challenge its existence or harmful effects on assessment. It is simply assumed that accountability is a natural and good part of the assessment equation, and the standard we seek to be accountable to aligns with our educational values. As a value-driven activity, assessment requires intensive discussion and dialogue to begin and consistent communication among those involved throughout to keep everyone in agreement and alignment. As the guidepost of assessment, values must also be used to evaluate potential mandates, approaches, and tools before student affairs educators can invest in the work. Higher education and student affairs must utilize these principles to remove values-incongruent accountability forces from assessment of student learning and development.

At Manresa, assessment is set as a priority by the CSAO with limited input from staff members. Becoming the best division of student affairs drives everything, including assessment. I did not find evidence of assessment efforts being rooted in educational values or the staff engaging in dialogue about how assessment could honor and sustain their institutional, divisional, and professional values. There was minimal discussion among staff and only a few large staff meetings and trainings over the years to address,

mostly from a technical standpoint, how to assess. Yet what is most alarming is that at an institution so rich in mission and values staff members are unaware of the fact that their assessment processes and practices are not aligned with who they are and what they believe. Staff members in the division know "assessment" is important because their CSAO and education at large says it is so, but they do not recognize its value in practice or that it validates their work. The sporadic inclusion of assessment as a topic continues with lack of critical awareness of effects on higher education and students. Assessment is seen as a separate and distinct activity from the top down, further evidence the division is not engaging is values-driven assessment. These issues must be addressed to set a productive course for assessment within student affairs.

Student Affairs Educators' Responsibility in Assessment

Assessment is not simply a task or responsibility; it is a process and a discourse. As a "process of observing and assigning value or worth to an event or activity," student affairs educators must learn assessment techniques and engage is discussions about what is important to measure and how it can best be measured before conducting the assessment (Keeling et al., 2008, p. 10). In this process, student affairs educators must be critical of established "answers" to significant questions and issues that exist on campus. They cannot assume their issue is the same as other institutions, results will be similar, or that the "answer" provides the desired outcome. It is common practice to treat every issue as a technical one because it places ownership on individuals, not the community, and is more conducive to simple metrics and measures. In addition, it is easier to conduct. If student affairs educators do not challenge current practices of using "off-the-shelf

solutions" to complex issues, the work of student affairs will devolve to treating students as potential laborers instead of developing them as critical thinkers and creative beings.

If student affairs educators do not understand the larger concept of assessment, its history, motives, implications, repercussions, uses, and outcomes, they could be blindly engaging in work they ethically or morally oppose. Most staff members in the division of student affairs at Manresa have not spent significant time learning what assessment is, how it can affect their practice, or effects on students that could really drive or alter their programs, and even mission. They have also not spent the time in discourse about it, its value, and how assessment can engage students and transform learning into deep learning. Conversations and trainings about assessment attempt to teach the staff members tasks and tools for a concept they do not fully understand. Staff members are kept in the loop just enough to maintain motivation to "assess" but in the dark enough so they do not ask many or difficult questions. Beyond not being an effective use of time, there are significant implications of uninformed work. In accepting initiatives, regardless of how great and important they sound or who is presenting or mandating it, student affairs educators must own the responsibility of educating themselves appropriately and thoroughly, which includes critiquing the initiative. As an example, I have been singing the praises of assessment for almost a decade, and it was not until analyzing my data that I began to see and understand the complexity of assessment on a larger scale and the influence of neoliberalism on the work. It is easier to accept other's truth than to seek your own, but it is worth the effort to critique and discover it.

Student affairs educators have long taken pride in being advocates for students and acknowledging their individual capacities (American College Personnel Association,

1996; ACPA & NASPA, 2004; ACE, 1949), but they are falling short in terms of protecting and advocating for students in terms of assessment. On a basic level, student affairs educators are slow or hesitant to assessment student learning (Bresciani et al., 2004). On a larger scale, student affairs educators are not taking advantage of assessment as a process and dialogue to focus on and improve student learning and development. They are also not addressing the negative consequences of accountability practices on students because they are unwilling to invest time in understanding assessment and its capabilities. Student affairs educators, all educators for that matter, must stay committed to the values of education, democracy, and community. Educators are the protectors of students and community, and they must be mindful in accepting the responsibility of assessment of student learning and development and how to maintain students as center to their work.

CSAO as Assessment Leader

As the one who faces perhaps the greatest accountability pressures, the CSAO must understand the difference between accountability and assessment. In addition to being accountable for the recommendations and findings outlined for all student affairs educators, the CSAO has a greater duty to critique and challenge pressures put on student affairs and for the priorities he/she selects. The responsibility of the CSAO, as leader of the division of student affairs is significant. The attitude, ethics, actions, and decisions of the CSAO set the tone and environment for the organization. CSAOs influence, if not direct, their staff members, and often their beliefs and actions go unchallenged because of the authority and power differential between the CSAO and members of the staff. Therefore, the knowledge, research, process, and preparation of the CSAO to make

decisions directly affects the quality of the subsequent actions and decisions taken by the CSAO, the division as a collective, and individual staff members. Even in a bottom-up approach to incorporating assessment as a priority in the division, the CSAO has influence and approval on what and how things happen. Manresa's CSAO understands half of this responsibility; he acknowledges and takes ownership of setting assessment as a priority for the division of student affairs, but he does not take the needed time to vet and critique his leadership style and decisions related to assessment. CSAOs must internalize their privilege of great authority so they do not act too quickly or brashly on complex and complicated initiatives like assessment.

Demands on the time of CSAOs are numerous and constant, making it more challenging to give proper time and attention to large or complex questions or initiatives; however, that is where their time is best spent. CSAOs cannot look to other divisions of student affairs to copy their assessment work because the context and results will not yield similar, appropriate, or needed data. As a process and discourse, each campus and CSAO must do the work as a campus team to engage in assessment. Manresa's CSAO is doing what we believes other top divisions of student affairs are doing, without understanding the behind the scenes work that occurred to establish current practices or what is maintaining their efforts. In setting excellence as the priority and goal of his tenure, he made decisions about assessment without realizing. Excellence rhetoric aligns with neoliberal values and discourse; they both focus on self-preservation and prioritizing working alone versus in collaboration with others. In other public ways, Manresa's CSAO communicates that students are the reason for his work and that he cares about the quality of their experience at the institution and within the division, but similar to the

facade created by neoliberalism to appear logical and appropriate, the CSAO is living a double life. Other CSAOs can avoid, or at least begin to navigate, this problem if they examine all levels of decisions to ensure they honor the mission of the institution, the values of student affairs, and their ethical code. Further, assessment must be vetted against institutions' missions and values as well as those of student affairs to ensure they support, not hinder, the fulfillment of the missions and edification of the values.

Importance of Challenging the Status Quo

In this study I address the influence and effects of neoliberalism on assessment, with some attention given to its effects on higher education, but the reach of neoliberalism is far beyond assessment. Neoliberalism affects all aspects of society and how people view themselves and the world. It will take a great deal of time and substantial, collective effort to begin to name and challenge neoliberalism's influence over education and assessment. Neoliberalism has over 40 years of practice infiltrating society and all of its components. Not only is it well established in society, most citizens are completely unaware of its existence and its effect on their lives. And likely in the majority of cases, the common-sense approach taken by neoliberalism to be adopted as common practice and belief makes it more challenging to alter and reverse the influence, as the efforts are seen as un-American. While not impossible, breaking through the neoliberal hold on society and education is a significant undertaking that will take great care, planning, collaboration, and time.

As I have shown, neoliberalism's reach and depth is significant, but from a philosophical stance it is important to not only focus on addressing neoliberalism but learn how to recognize and respond to any pressure, external or internal to education, that

seeks to control or push education away from its democratic ideals and transformative power. The moral of this study is not about beating neoliberalism; it is about being cognizant of your surroundings, critical of how to approach work, and holding true to the core of your mission and values. There are always going to be forces pushing student affairs educators, and citizen for that matter, to think and act differently so we need to learn how to appropriately navigate and respond to honor the values and beliefs we hold and preserve the future of society and the collective "we". As such, we must: (a) resist becoming solitary soldiers who manage everything on our own and are only concerned with how the system benefits us; (b) look out and care for others; and (c) trust that others are watching out for us. To live in community, we must be a community.

Summary

Each of my findings provides insight into my primary research question: why is assessment not pervasive or consistent practice within student affairs? Taken together, they challenge student affairs to have the process, not the tasks, drive their assessment efforts. Assessment should be a process and dialogue that sustains and guides effective practice that honors the values and mission of education and a democracy society. Leaders who are ready to invest in assessment of student learning and development should be prepared to build a living process that challenges discourses that derail them from living their mission as well as guides them to tell a story of what really matters, through dialogue between and among them and their students. The process and approach includes using values to focus and drive the entire assessment process, thoughtful vetting and critiquing of assessment initiatives and tools, having a strong and informed leader in the CSAO, and intentionally addressing neoliberalism and other external pressures to

manage potential concerns with accountability infused assessment and the gap in knowledge and practice of assessment that makes it challenging for student affairs educators to see assessment as worthwhile, valuable, and essential.

Implications

The implications of my study are relevant to all areas of education, but specifically designed for divisions of student affairs. Several key implications are: the need to be mindful of how student affairs partners with and supports business and government; good intentions only go so far; and there is value in digging deeper. Before this study, I was cognizant of the language I used and decisions I made related to supporting or advocating for business preparation benefits that students gain through co-curricular learning and experiences. I did not want to fuel the idea that the only reason to do anything in college is to make the student a better candidate or employee, as I do not believe professional career placement is the only or primary purpose of higher education and student affairs opportunities. However, what might appear to be good intentions and useful resources from donors, corporations, and governmental agencies, might have a different outcome and effect than anticipated; for example, the capital campaign funding for new facilities for student affairs at Manresa. Earlier I touted how impressive it is to see such significant financial support directed at student affairs, but when viewed through a more critical lens there are several potential repercussion. First, investing in infrastructure and beautiful facilities places a greater priority on image and reputation than student learning. Further, new state-of-the-art facilities have become a factor in what college or university students use to select their alma mater. The need for institutions to stay current and updated increases business profits, which is an intentional design of the

neoliberal economy. Second, the effectiveness and quality of student affairs work will be viewed through how many people use the facilities and other non-learning measurements instead of changes in student and campus culture and environment, which minimizes student affairs contribution to the educational mission of the institution. The bottom line is student affairs must thoroughly think through and critique potential partnerships for a variety of outcomes and effects to ensure it is an appropriate and beneficial partnership or sponsorship.

Regarding intentions, it cannot be assumed that high quality mission and values statements and other guiding documents will make the aims reality. Good intentions only go so far; there must be considerable effort and commitment to realizing institutional mission and goals. Manresa University's guiding statements and promise are among the best in communicating what is distinctive, special, and important to Manresa and what they means for its community. However, as I have shown, those values and goals are held by individual student affairs educators but are not consistent common practice and discourse among and between members of the community. Specifically regarding assessment, there is no acknowledgement or integration of Manresa's values into their assessment activity. I assumed that any and all work at Manresa would need to stem from its mission but I was never given that impression regarding assessment. If this is not happening at Manresa, it will be a greater challenge for other, less values-focused, institutions to incorporate mission and values into assessment processes. Again, assessment must stem from educational values, not other forces or pressures, to be effective in contributing to the mission of the institution (AAHE, 1992).

Finally, as discovered in my study, taking things at face value is dangerous. We must dig deeper and be more critical of thoughts presented as fact. Neoliberalism becomes stronger and harder to dismantle each day that it is not challenged. Relying on others' opinions to make our own removes the need to think, analyze, and make decisions, which is a very slippery slope. Student affairs must assert its power and authority over its key responsibilities outlined in its professional documents, like educating the whole person and advocating for student success, to maintain ownership of this incredible responsibility. No one else is looking out for student affairs, so student affairs educators must take responsibility for directing its future by digging deep into issues and topics to fully understand what is at stake and what are the best paths to take.

Recommendations

The findings from this study offer several insights for future practice and recommendations for future research. In this section, I offer direction to improve future assessment approaches, specifically for CSAOs and student affairs graduate programs. I also provide recommendations for future research in theorizing of assessment and several recommendations for future research to explore how assessment of student learning and development is infused into student affairs educators' practice.

Future Practice: Chief Student Affairs Officers

The support and leadership of the CSAO to encourage engagement in assessment of student learning and development is an important component to creating a culture of assessment (Green, Jones, & Aloi, 2008). Based on my findings, the prioritization of assessment by the CSAO over an extended period of time (e.g., several years) results in his or her staff being able to articulate, and likely believe in, the importance of assessing

student learning and development. Dr. Alex knew from the beginning that building "a culture of assessment takes time", but he unfortunately is building a culture of accountability, not assessment. While he articulates assessment as priority of his tenure, the division is not further along in improving student learning and development through its assessment efforts than when he began because they are not approaching it as a shared process.

The findings of my study provide a new way of approaching assessment of student learning and development by challenging student affairs educators to look beyond the act of assessing to its purpose and intentions. CSAOs can begin to build a division of student affairs that is mindful of assessment principles and institutional mission by internalize the findings of my study: (a) value as the backbone of assessment; (b) student affairs educators' responsibility in assessment; (c) CSAO as assessment leader; and (d) importance of challenging the status quo. Further, they can examine how institutional and professional values drive their work, how they define success or excellence for the division, and implications of decisions on students and their learning. While additional research into each finding and how they can support one another would assist CSAOs in leading the process, CSAOs cannot skip over addressing their responsibility in the process. Existing resources can serve as tools and guides for the technical aspects of how to conduct assessment, but before those pieces can be useful and meaningful a culture of transformative assessment must be established among the division staff members through sustained dialogue about what is important. Unlike other publications on building a culture of assessment or evidence, these themes address the foundation and philosophical aspects of assessing student learning and development within student affairs.

Tierney's (1988) framework on organizational culture offers guidance in how CSAOs can understand and approach learning their current organizational culture and how to modify the culture to value assessment of student learning and development. He recognizes the influence internal and external factors have in organizations, but argues administrators do not truly learn about the internal organizational culture until they disrupt it (Tierney, 1988).

> Only when we break these codes and conventions are we forcibly reminded of their presence and considerable power…As a result, we frequently find ourselves dealing with organizational culture in an atmosphere of crisis management, instead of reasoned reflection and consensual change. (Tierney, 1988, p. 4)

Acknowledging and empowering the organizational culture of divisions of student affairs can be a strategy for CSAOs to utilize when establishing assessment practices that honor the values, mission, and culture of the division. Strengthening the culture of the division is an effective way to engage in meaningful dialogue, build teams, enhance communication, and increase the level of commitment to shared goals and values, all of which support educational goals. CSAOs alone cannot challenge and address accountability pressures, but they should serve as the leader and facilitator of the effort and employ all available resources to initiate change.

Future Practice: Teaching Assessment

There are many ways each of us can learn about assessment, including academic programs, literature, trainings, and lived experiences. Currently these methods are significantly influenced by accountability and are teaching mental models that do not necessarily honor student learning and democratic values. Findings from my study can begin to improve practice in each of these areas as well as help to reframe how we think

about and teach assessment. First, academic degree programs are where most of

Manresa's student affairs educators learned about assessment, which is likely true for

many other student affairs professionals. There is coursework and courses, at all levels

(i.e., undergraduate, masters, doctoral) that address assessment as a content area and

philosophy. Fortunately, this can be an easy environment to alter relatively quick, partly

due to and partly in spite of academic freedom. Academic programs and courses are

controlled environments in which assessment is discussed and sometimes practiced, but

conversations and knowledge transfers are the core of learning. Therefore, changes to

curriculum that include critiquing assessment and the forces that drive and influence it

can be shared among assessment faculty and then taught to numerous students. In a

similar fashion, once this study is published and shared, assessment literature can begin

to reflect a new understanding of assessment. Sometimes one publication or author can

begin a wave of new research and scholarship, which can also transform related dialogue

and discourse to further advance the thinking on a topic. Hopefully my study can begin a

new line of discourse that changes how people think about and engage in assessment of

student learning and development.

The more challenging methods of assessment knowledge sharing to transform are

training and lived experiences. Student affairs educators are picking up pieces of

assessment knowledge and skills from trainings, conferences, or other professional

development experiences. Not only will it take many years for the dialogue and

understanding of assessment to evolve on such a wide scale, but it will also be a

challenge to update the traditional models of information sharing to reflect exemplary

practices and understanding of adult learning that respect discourse as a critical aspect of

the new way of thinking about assessment. One recommendation is changing how assessment information is taught. Presenters should rely less on cognitive and situative learning and more on behaviorist principles (Greeno, Collins, & Resnick, 1996) that align with adult learning theory of connecting knowledge and experiences with existing ones (Cranton, 1994). While this approach might be more challenging and slow, it will pay off in time, because the reach is broader than courses and literature.

Finally, lived experiences with assessment cannot be ignored as a major contributor to how assessment is understood and valued by members of society. The messages individuals receive about assessment through how they are assessed affect the greatest percentage of the population, compared to the other methods discussed. What has been defined and used as assessment, evaluation, or accountability directly influences what individuals believe about assessment. Familiarity with and assumptions about assessment based on lived experiences frame future practice. The quantity and quality of assessment-based activities, projects, and readings done in academic degree programs will dictate the level of assessment knowledge and attitude toward it for student affairs educators and the general population. To reach the most future student affairs educators and future college students and reframe U.S. views on assessment, the entire educational system must update and enhance its assessment understanding, processes, and practices to honor student learning. A major reform of educational assessment is needed to achieve this goal.

Future Research: Theorizing Assessment

While the core of my research question is exploring why assessment is not pervasive or consistent practice within student affairs, my initial thinking framed the

study in terms of building a culture of assessment within a division of student affairs from the inside out. Through the study I hoped to learn about new ways to approach building a culture of assessment that did not center on the technical and accountability focused rhetoric and approaches that dominate education, but instead focus the student affairs educators who engage in the work. But as I analyzed the case through neoliberal concepts, I realized one reason there is such an imbalance in quality and frequency of message between accountability and commitment to improvement by educators. The neoliberal enterprise is strategically and intentionally working to control the educational system for its benefit. The hurdle for higher quality and quantity assessment does not rest in the accountability and internal commitment to improvement split alone, the issue is much larger. My study opens the door to future research by exposing the influence external forces, like neoliberalism, have over assessment. I begin to define and describe factors, specifically neoliberalism and individual student affairs educators, that do not received much, if any, attention in the context of assessment, but now that this information is exposed, additional research can be done to further analyze and theorize significant factors and forces that influence assessment of student learning and development.

Future Research: Student Affairs Assessment

Conducting this study was an interesting and insightful process. I offer several recommendations to direct future research on understanding how divisions of student affairs can enhance their assessment of student learning and development efforts. My goal was to identify and describe the key components in building a culture of assessment, and future research into each aspect or component of the process identified in this study

is worthy of additional research. Specifically, there is more to learn regarding the "human will" (Angelo, 1999) and internal commitment to improvement aspects of engaging in assessment; really, the entire dichotomous relationship established in the literature about the forces and rhetoric surrounding assessment is a study in and of itself. I also hardly scratched the surface of how individual student affairs educators' perceptions of and motivations toward assessment affect how they engage in the work. What would engage them, as adults, in authentic learning of assessment is a potential study. In a similar vein, researching student affairs educators' thoughts on assessment and accountability, the effects of each on practice, and the interplay of the two could help in educating future student affairs educators about the difference between the two. Finally, I used neoliberalism as the critical analysis for this study but there are likely other lenses by which assessment can be analyzed to deepen our understanding of the topic and its relationship to society.

I also offer completing this study on other divisions of student affairs and at various levels within divisions of student affairs could advance our understanding of how student affairs educators learn about and engage in assessing student learning and development. I intentionally selected a division of student affairs that did not have a director of assessment for the division because I believe richer data on creating a culture of assessing student learning and development could be gained in a decentralized assessment structure. However, it would be interesting to conduct the same study with a division of student of affairs who has a director of assessment to compare and contrast the studies. Further, in retrospect, the case criteria were good in selecting my case, but the criterion of presentations and publications involved some neoliberal credentialing at

Manresa that I did not anticipate. The criteria used and how they manifest at Manresa opened the door to the influence of neoliberalism so different criteria might expose other new issues or topics. Research on each of these question is valuable, and taken together with this study can provide a more complete picture of how assessment is understood and realized within student affairs.

Conclusions

My study exposes complex and larger issues surrounding assessment of student learning and development and its potential to aid and advocate for students and their learning. I made the same assumption other assessment advocates or scholars make, that assessment (including accountability) is good and beneficial at its core, and built my study on exploring ways to make assessment better and more pervasive in practice. But as discussed, this assumption is void of substantial critique of assessment. Accountability efforts are heavily influenced by neoliberal forces to increase efficiency, diminish community and collective responsibility, and convert education into training grounds for business, not society. The postmodern condition and its key characteristic, fragmentation, underlie and work actively to maintain both the neoliberal economic enterprise and the accountability franchise. The compilation of these forces and their alliance is harmful to higher education, including the student affairs profession. Efforts to improve participation or motivation of student affairs educators will not be productive until accountability is separated from assessment, philosophically and practically, and progress in made in restoring assessment processes, discourse, and practice to the transformative, on-going, collaborative, and values-driven work it is designed and capable of being.

The post-modern notion of fragmentation was introduced by Jean François Lyotard in the 1970s. Fragmentation is an important construct to acknowledge at this point because it has entered modern life through the post-modern and is manifest in our conscious thought and actions. In the workplace, as at Manresa, the formerly systematic is now fragmented as a means of control. As in a factory production model, no one has the big picture, only the tiny task they are charged with doing. This does two things: (a) it gives the person at the helm (the one with full knowledge) full power over the process, and (b) fragmentation of systems like assessment alleviates the need for overall mastery of assessment. It also gives those below the leader an easy out: I don't know how to do that…I don't know what this is supposed to do or mean. Fragmentation is a problem created and sustained by the metanarrative of neoliberalism, in the case of my study. The fragmented approach to building assessment practices and a culture of assessment at Manresa ultimately diminishes any gains made through the work. Individual assessment elements (i.e., attendance numbers, program learning outcome surveys, focus groups) do not connect with others nor do they attempt to address larger, significant aspects of assessing student learning in the co-curriculum. In addition, it reinforces the notion that student affairs educators do not need to fully understand assessment beyond what they are asked to do. Unless the CSAO, as leader of student affairs, is aware of these issues and actively works to challenge them, the assessment landscape will likely not alter its trajectory.

As established, the leadership of the CSAO is central to the approach and manifestation of assessment within student affairs. While there are leadership issues related to Manresa's CSAO, like his definition of excellence, I challenge us to look

beyond individual CSAOs to break free from the individualistic view of leader and acknowledge the value of leadership as a process. Like assessment, leadership is a process that must include more than one person for it to be meaningful and successful (Northouse, 2014). The CSAO cannot (because of time and knowledge constraints), and should not, direct the entire assessment process or unilaterally make all significant assessment decisions. On the surface it is ineffective practice to funnel everything through one person, and on a deeper level a shared responsibility of assessment opposes the individual focus of neoliberalism and fragmentation of assessment. Divisions of student affairs and directors of assessment for student affairs should be able to look to their CSAO for their expertise, experience, and perspective when integrating assessment into the work of the division, but their guidance should be vetted to align with exemplary practice, research, and mission and outcomes established by the group. The CSAO has a responsibility to be the thought-leader and critical evaluator in setting divisional priorities and approving decisions. However, to allow for CSAOs to complete this level of in-depth work, changes must be made in demands on their time. Currently, CSAOs' time is consumed with responding to crises, participation in numerous meetings at all levels of the institution, attending university events, and navigating personnel issues, to name a few. They have very little time in their week to read and research to stay current on the myriad of areas they oversee. Therefore, to see changes in the level of leadership a CSAO can provide and to establish a culture that expects staff members to engage in the assessment and leadership process, major changes to organizational structures and cultures, as directed by my study, are needed.

Given the findings of my study, the roles and responsibilities of student affairs directors of assessment benefit from shifting from the technical to the adaptive, human, and values-oriented aspects of assessment. Regardless of motivation for hire, directors of assessment spend a significant amount of their time navigating and addressing accountability and compliance demands placed on higher education and student affairs. Confined by time or task, quick or simple technical tools, tasks, or approaches are used to demonstrate the effectiveness of student affairs programs and services. Directors of assessment are not intentionally ignoring the more challenging and time-consuming aspects of assessment, those components are less valued, more time-intensive, and/or demonstrate less publically demanded data. Student learning and development assessment is not the current focus of public assessment or accountability dialogue.

To begin to shift the culture of assessment from accountability and technical approaches to commitment to improvement and improving student learning and development, the job description of the student affairs director of assessment must shift philosophical and practically. Directors of assessment must focus on big picture issues, like values, mission, and learning, of assessment in community with various members of the campus community, and others as appropriate. The director of assessment should frame assessment as a dialogue and process that can maintain and enhance institutional missions through collaborative and intentional planning, communication, and efforts. It is through building a community of student affairs educators who acknowledge the need for and contribution of assessment that they will begin to see contributions to student learning and development and fulfillment of institutional mission. And while this work sounds monumental, mostly because it is, it does not have to feel as such. The

frameworks for success already exist. By nature, student affairs educators are caring and thoughtful people who want the best for their students. In addition, student affairs has clearly established purposes and values, a wealth of informational resources, and natural infrastructures for community and communication building. With these elements in place, directors of assessment can recognize "quick wins" early to build confidence and interest in assessment while at the same time systematically working in concert with members of the staff to build a thoughtful, comprehensive assessment vision and plan that inspires changes in practice that improve students' experiences and learning and honors the mission of higher education and student affairs.

Summary

I shed light on the importance of seeing assessment as more than a technical skill but an issue of human will and understanding, of individuals and corporations. I address a vast hole in assessment research by looking at my data through a critical theory. Deep critiques of assessment as a practice in education are not the focus of discussion. Assessment scholars can be quick to address elements of non-exemplar assessment practice or selection of measures, but they do not examining why assessment continues to be an uphill battle after decades of resources dedicated to the topic. My findings challenge student affairs, as a profession and as staff members on campuses, to think differently about how to approach assessment. Beyond what is specifically happening at Manresa, which has potential for a more critical approach, given its Jesuit roots and current commitments, this study demonstrates the need for new non-technical resources and research that analyzes assessment initiatives for implications on practice and institutional mission and values. My findings, based on the structure of the study, are not

to be generalized to other institutions, but should be used to offer substantial insight and analysis of the current forces and issues facing divisions of student affairs that want to engage in meaningful assessment of student learning and development. Offering a thorough understanding of this case hopefully assists student affairs educators in seeing difference or similarities to their institution and ways to improve their overall approach to assessment of student learning and development.

I continue to be amazed with what I am learning through this process. Even though I began my research with an awareness of the dichotomous relationship of assessment – accountability versus internal commitments to improvement, I did not realize how pervasive and engrained the technical accountability approach, influenced by the neoliberal economy, is. I specifically do not address my ancillary research questions after the *Research Design and Methodology* chapter, because they are too technical in nature and limit the scope and findings of my study. The interpretivist approach to my research allowed me to follow the data and expand the assessment conversation for student affairs beyond the traditional rhetoric that has stalled out assessment, within student affairs and higher education. "If a question is worth answering, then the underlying issue should be considered worthy of simple and sustained observation" (Dunkelman, 2014, ¶11). And it will be the sustained observation and critique of current practices that will help us move assessment forward. My study provides greater findings than I ever imagined and am thankful for the process that is allowing me to address significant gaps in assessment research and analysis.

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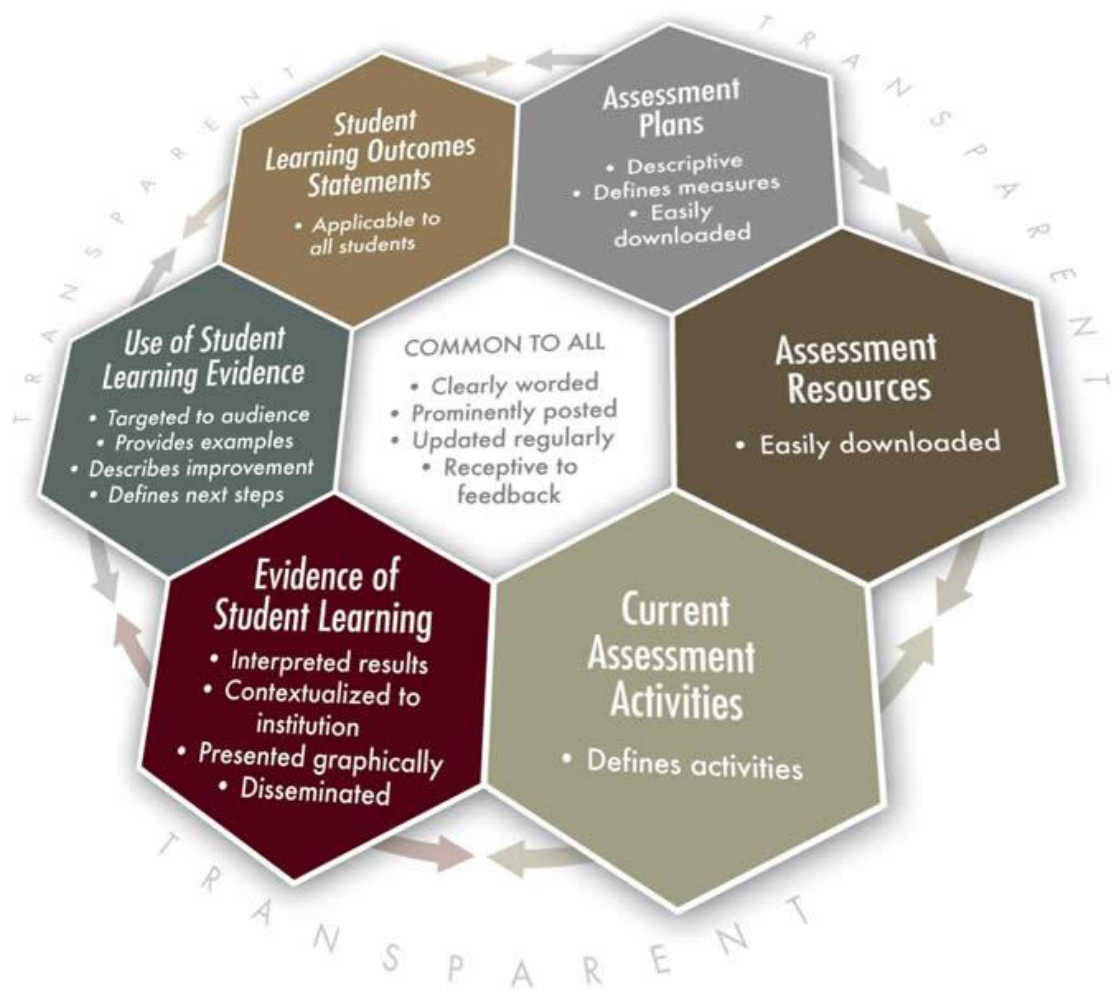
✓ Student learning outcomes statements: Student learning outcomes statements clearly state the expected knowledge, skills, attitudes, competencies, and habits of mind that students are expected to acquire at an institution of higher education.

✓ Assessment plans: Campus plans for gathering evidence of student learning might include institution-wide or program specific approaches that convey how student learning will be assessed, the data collection tools and approaches that will be used, and the timeline for implementation.

✓ Assessment resources: Assessment resources encompass information or training provided to faculty and staff to help them understand, develop, implement, communicate, and use evidence of student learning.

✓ Current assessment activities: Current assessment activities include information on a full range of projects and activities recently completed or currently underway to gauge student learning, make improvements or respond to accountability interests.

✓ Evidence of student learning: Evidence of student learning includes results of assessment activities. This may include evidence of indirect (e.g. surveys) and direct (e.g. portfolio) student learning as well as institutional performance indicators (e.g. licensure pass rate).

✓ Use of student learning evidence: This component represents the extent to which evidence of student learning is used to identify areas where changes in policies and practices may lead to improvement, inform institutional decision-making, problem identification, planning, goal setting, faculty development, course revision, program review, and accountability or accreditation self-study.

http://www.learningoutcomeassessment.org/TFcomponents.htm

APPENDIX B

SURVEY RECRUITMENT AND INFORMED CONSENT LETTER

Good morning. My name is Erin Thomas. I am a doctoral candidate at Illinois State University conducting a research study on assessment of student learning and development within student affairs. Your institution/division met the initial criteria, presenting or publishing assessment related topics in 2011, and is one of 12 institutions asked to complete this survey. It is my hope you will take five to ten minutes to complete this data gathering document; you have the potential to make an important contribution to the profession and the area of assessing student learning and development.

The survey is available at:
https://survey.lilt.ilstu.edu/TakeSurvey.aspx?SurveyID=981L6851.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to participate at any point in time. Your participation will remain confidential. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me. I can be reached at:

Campus Mailing Address: Illinois State University, Campus Box 3090, Normal, IL 61790-3090

Office Phone with Private Voice Mail: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Cell Phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

I am very excited about this project and hope you take the time in the next two weeks to complete the survey.

Sincerely,

Erin E. P. Thomas
Doctoral Candidate
Education Administration and Foundations
Illinois State University

APPENDIX C

CULTURE OF ASSESSMENT SURVEY TO SSAOs [CSAOs]

Demographic Information
The contact and demographic information you provide in this survey will only be used
for the purpose of dissertation research to select a case for the study. The information will
only be seen by members of the research team and not shared with anyone else. In
addition, direct contact or demographic information will remain confidential in all phases
of the research.

1) Name of institution
2) Name of senior [chief] student affairs officer
3) How many years have you served as the senior [chief] student affairs officer
   (SSAO) at your current institution?
4) How many fulltime professionals work in your division of student affairs?
   (Approximate number is sufficient.)
5) Does your division engage in assessment of student learning and development?
6) If you answered 'yes' in the previous question, skip this one and proceed to the
   rest of the survey. If you answered 'no' please share why you don't engage in
   assessment of student learning and development.
7) Who leads your assessment efforts? (Mark all that apply.)
    a. Senior [chief] Student Affairs Officer
    b. Assessment Director/Coordinator (fulltime staff dedicated to assessment)
    c. Assessment Committee
    d. Individual staff members
    e. No one
    f. Other: _____
8) What level(s) of staff members engage in assessment of student learning and
   development? (Mark all that apply.)
    a. Frontline staff
    b. New professionals
    c. Administrative support staff
    d. Mid-level professionals
    e. Executive level professionals
    f. Senior Student Affairs Officer
    g. Assessment Office staff
    h. Other: _____
9) Do you have a written assessment plan?
10) Is learning and/or developmental theory a part of training for staff who engage in
    assessment of student learning and development?

11) Do you have divisional learning or developmental outcomes for students?
12) What role do students play in how the division assesses student learning and development?
   a. Participants (recipients of data collection)
   b. Committee/Council member
   c. Advisory Board review
   d. Lead efforts
   e. Department advisory board (direct feedback)
   f. Other: _____
13) What models, frameworks, or documents guide your assessment practices?
14) What is your greatest priority concerning student learning and development?

APPENDIX D

EMAIL TO VICE PRESIDENT

Dear _____,

Greetings! My name is Erin Thomas. I am a doctoral student at Illinois State University conducting a research study on assessment of student learning and development within student affairs. Your division meets the criteria for this research, including being recognized for your work or knowledge in the area of assessment and evaluation and the promotion of learning within your division. It is my hope that you will consider being a part of this study, as you have the potential to make an important contribution to the profession and the area of assessing student learning and development.

The purpose of my study is to explore the critical elements involved in how a division of student affairs staff is able to systematically and systemically work together to improve student learning through assessment of student learning and development. The study will consist of interviews, document analysis, and observations. Interviews will consist of an initial individual interview with you, approximately 45-60 minutes long, with the likely potential for follow up interviews. I will also request interviews with your divisional staff members. Each staff member will be asked for consent and has the right to refuse participation. In addition, their choice to participate or not is confidential.

During our first interview, I'd like to collect your divisional documents related to assessment of student learning and development for document analysis. I will also request documents from staff members. Regarding observations, I'd like your permission to serve as a temporary member of the highest assessment group/staff within the division to interact with staff as well as observe what is happening. In addition, I'd like access to observe formal and informal staff/divisional meetings, trainings, and professional development sessions for the course of an academic semester to get a true sense of what is happening within your division.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may choose not to participate at any point in time. Your participation will remain confidential as pseudonyms will be used for each participant and institutional characteristics/descriptor will be limited to not disclose its identity. If you are interested in participating, please contact me at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you wish to contact me with questions or for any other reason I can be reached at:

Campus Mailing Address: Illinois State University, Campus Box 3090, Normal, IL
61790-3090
Office Phone with Private Voice Mail: █████████
Cell Phone: ████████
Email: ████████████

I am very excited about this project and hope you would consider participating. I look
forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Erin E. P. Thomas
Doctoral Candidate
Education Administration and Foundations
Illinois State University

APPENDIX E

INFORMED CONSENT FORM (AGREEMENT WITH THE DIVISION)

The purpose of my research study is to explore the critical elements involved in how a division of student affairs staff is able to systematically work together to improve student learning through assessment of student learning and development. I ask you to consider having your division of student affairs serve as the case for this study, as there is the potential to make an important contribution to the profession and the area of assessing student learning and development. I hope to learn how your colleagues engage in assessment of student learning and development to create a framework or model for how other colleagues can engage similarly in the work to achieve comparable outcomes and benefits.

Your division's participation in the study will consist of staff interviews, temporary membership in your assessment committee or highest level assessment work team or staff, observations of divisional and assessment meetings, and access to assessment documents. The interviews will consist of individual interviews (with you and your staff), approximately 45-60 minutes long, at the time and location of the staff members choosing. I will also request interviews with your divisional staff members. Each staff member will be asked for consent and has the right to refuse participation. In addition, their choice to participate or not is confidential. All interviews will be audiotaped/recorded. The observation will occur in formal and informal meetings and impromptu staff gathering.

Risks involved with this study are social in nature. While a concerted effort will be made to keep the identity of institution and participants confidential, there is a small risk that non-participants could figure out which division of student affairs is the focus of this study. This is only a notable concern if there are negative comments or findings revealed; if the study praises the work of the division, participants might take pride in others recognizing they are the focus of the study. There are also social risks for divisional participants. The decision of divisional staff members to participate in the study or not as well as what information is disclose could jeopardize individual's reputation, standing with you or other colleagues, or (worst case scenario) jobs. Systems are in place to minimize these risks, including not sharing staff member's status in the study with anyone, meeting where and when staff are comfortable, and removing identifiable descriptor (i.e., job titles) in printed materials about the study.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may chose for the division of student affairs to not participate at any point in time. Your refusal to participate or discontinuing participation at any time involves no penalty or loss of benefits. The

confidentiality of your participation is important to me, both at your institution and within the study. Your participation will remain confidential within written and audio recordings, as you will select a pseudonym to be used in the study. Data will also be kept secure in locked cabinets or in password protected files on my personal computer in locked locations.

If you have questions about the research, contact Erin E.P. Thomas, or about research participants' rights, please contact Kathy Spence.

Erin E. P. Thomas
Campus Mailing Address: Illinois State University, Campus Box 3090, Normal, IL 61790-3090
Cell Phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮ *or*
Kathy Spence at the Research Ethics & Compliance Office
(309) 438-2529

I agree to participate in this study as outlined above.

_____   _____
SSAO's Name (printed)   Date

_____
Institution

_____
Signature

APPENDIX F

INFORMED CONSENT/CONFIDENTIALITY STATEMENT

The purpose of my research study is to explore the critical elements involved in how a division of student affairs staff is able to systematically work together to improve student learning through assessment of student learning and development. I ask you to consider being a part of this study, as you have the potential to make an important contribution to the profession and the area of assessing student learning and development. I hope to learn how colleagues engage in assessment of student learning and development to create a framework or model for how other colleagues can engage similarly in the work to achieve comparable outcomes and benefits.

Your participation in the study will consist of one interview (and likely a second) and observations in divisional and program level meetings. The interview(s) will consist of an individual interview with you, approximately 45-60 minutes long, at the time and location of your choosing. All interviews will be audiotaped/recorded. The observations will occur in formal meetings and informal staff setting, per the senior student affairs officer's approval.

Risks involved with this study are social in nature. While a concerted effort will be made to keep the identity of institution and participants confidential, there is a small risk that non-participants could figure out which division of student affairs is the focus of this study. This is only a notable concern if there are negative comments or findings revealed; if the study praises the work of the division, participants might take pride in others recognizing they are the focus of the study. There are also social risks for divisional participants. The decision of divisional staff members to participate in the study or not as well as what information is disclose could jeopardize individual's reputation, standing with the senior student affairs officer or other colleagues, or (worst case scenario) jobs. Systems are in place to minimize these risks, including not sharing staff member's status in the study with anyone, meeting where and when staff are comfortable, and removing identifiable descriptor (i.e. job titles) in printed materials about the study.

Participation in the interview component of this study is entirely voluntary and you may chose not to participate at any point in time. Your refusal to participate or discontinuing participation at any time involves no penalty or loss of benefits. Since the approval of observations comes from the senior student affairs officer, those will be conducted regardless of your refusal to participate in the interviews. The confidentiality of your participation is important to me, both at your institution and within the study. Your participation will remain confidential within written and audio recordings, as you will

select a pseudonym to be used in the study. Data will also be kept secure in locked cabinets or in password protected files on my personal computer, and in locked locations.

If you have questions about the research, contact Erin E.P. Thomas, or about research participants' rights, please contact Kathy Spence.

Erin E. P. Thomas
Campus Mailing Address: Illinois State University, Campus Box 3090, Normal, IL 61790-3090
Cell Phone: ███████████ Email: ██████████████ *or*
Kathy Spence at the Research Ethics & Compliance Office
(309) 438-2529

I agree to participate in this study as outlined above.

_____   _____
Name (printed)   Date
_____
Signature

APPENDIX G

PARTICIPANT SOLICITATION EMAIL

Dear _____,

Greetings! My name is Erin Thomas. I am a doctoral student at Illinois State University conducting a research study on assessment of student learning and development within student affairs. Your division meets the criteria for this research and will serve as the case for the study. It is my hope that you will consider being a part of this study, as you have the potential to make an important contribution to the profession and the area of assessing student learning and development. The purpose of my study is to explore the critical elements involved in how a division of student affairs staff is able to systematically and systemically work together to improve student learning through assessment of student learning and development.

Your participation in the study will consist of an interview (more if needed) and some observations in meetings. The interview(s) will consist of an individual interview with you, approximately one hour long, at the time and location of your choosing. The confidentiality of your participation is important to me, both at your institution and within the study. In addition, with your vice president's approval, I'll observe a few meetings or work on assessment.

Participation in this study is entirely voluntary and you may chose not to participate at any point in time. Your participation will remain confidential, as a pseudonym will be used in the study. If you are interested in participating, please contact me at your earliest convenience. If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me.

If you wish to contact me with questions or for any other reason, I can be reached at:

Campus Mailing Address: Illinois State University, Campus Box 3090, Normal, IL 61790-3090
Office Phone with Private Voice Mail: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮
Cell Phone: ▮▮▮▮▮▮
Email: ▮▮▮▮▮▮▮▮

I am very excited about this project and hope you would consider participating. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Erin E. P. Thomas
Doctoral Candidate
Education Administration and Foundations
Illinois State University

APPENDIX H

OBSERVATION PLAN

Dimensions of Fieldwork
The following sections outline decisions and their rationale made by the research team to conduct quality observations. This plan will serve as a guide for the observer in the field to stay aligned with the goals of the research as well as direct her time.

- Role of observer: half participant in the setting and half onlooker

The observer will serve as a temporary member of the leading group of assessment work within the division of student affairs, whether that is an assessment committee or as a member of the student affairs assessment staff. In addition, the observer will have access to attend divisional staff meetings and development sessions. The aim is in times of multiple or on-going observations and interviews that the observer will gain insight into how members of the division think and act towards assessment of student learning and development. During times of occasional interviews and observations, the observer will look at the data more from an onlooker perspective. The combination of participant and onlooker roles will allow the observer to see information differently and different information, thus strengthen and diversifying the data collected.

- Insider versus outsider perspective: more outsider (etic) perspective dominant

Full emersion to obtain an emic perspective is not needed for this research. If the observer becomes too entwined with the experience she might inadvertently internalize data (i.e. values, attitudes) of the staff members and miss noting key elements of the culture. However, the observer has enough background knowledge on the subject to make sense of common language or short-hand speak to not miss key messages/data.

- Who conducts the inquiry: solo researcher (the co-principal investigator)

- Disclosure of the observer's role to others: overt, full disclosure

While the presence of the observer may alter actions and discussion of staff members, it is not a major concern. In time, as the staff members become comfortable with the presence of the observer, their actions and discussions will be less guarded and more honest. There is also not a less invasive way to bring the observer into the division in a covert manner. The staff members would be more guarded and concerned with the observing coming in as a consultant.

- Duration of observation and fieldwork: multiple observation over the course of a semester

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The length of each observation and work session cannot be determined at this time, but the amassed hours in the field will total about 100 during an academic semester. Observations or interviews will be conducted until clear themes emerge from the data to answer the research question. The observations will occur in multiple settings such as impromptu conversations between staff members, formal working meetings, divisional staff meetings, and professional development sessions. The observations and the interviews will occur throughout the semester and will inform the work of the other; for example, as data is obtained in interviews it will be vetted with observational data. It is also likely that some, if not all, staff members will be asked to complete more than one interview.

- Focus of observations: evolving, emergent; on those who conduct assessment of student learning and development and the environment around them

The initial focus of the fieldwork is to explore the critical elements involved in how a division of student affairs staff is able to systematically work together to improve student learning through assessment of student learning and development. As data is obtained and analyzed, the direct or focus of the research could shift slightly to a more inclusive topic or become highly focused in one area on one element. Since there is limited data on the subject it would limit the results of the study to focus on one single element; at the core of this study, the data needs to speak for itself and provide new insight on the topic.

APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR SENIOR STUDENT AFFAIRS OFFICER (SSAO) [CSAO]

What do you enjoy about your job?
- Elements of the culture?
- People?
- Specific responsibilities?

What do you believe is the role of assessment of student learning and development in student affairs?
- Benefits/effects?
- Challenges?
- How do you contribute to the greater effort?

What are supports or challenges to your efforts to develop assessment of student learning and development within the division?
- Pressures – internal or external to institution?
- Expectations of the president?

What is your role in developing a culture of assessment of student learning and development within the division?
- How do you motivate the staff?

How and what do you communicate to the division of students affairs about assessment of student learning and development?
- How often does the "teaching" occur?
- What is the intention of the education?
- How much do you rely on colleagues or staff in communicating the message?

Describe the division's culture of assessment of student learning and development.
- Role of leadership
- Participation of others
- Reason it exists and/or is a priority?

What makes assessment of student learning and development successful here?
- How important is teamwork?
- Essential elements of practice?

Tell me about how you work or interact with your colleagues regarding assessment of student learning and development.
- What do you share – data or insights?
- What, if anything, is difficult to share?

Tell me about how you work or interact with your staff members regarding assessment of student learning and development.
- What do you share – data or insights?
- What, if anything, is difficult to share?

What else do I need to know about assessment of student learning and development at this institution?

APPENDIX J

INTERVIEW GUIDE FOR STAFF MEMBERS

Why did you select to work here?
- Position, division, and/or institution level influences?

What do you enjoy about your job?
- Elements of the culture?
- People?
- Specific responsibilities?

What do you believe is the role of assessment of student learning and development in student affairs?
- Benefits/effects?
- Challenges?
- How do you contribute to the greater effort?

How and what has the division of students affairs taught you about assessment of student learning and development?
- How often does the "teaching" occur?
- What is the intention of the education?
- Does education come from outside the division? If so, how?

Describe the division's culture of assessment of student learning and development.
- Role of leadership
- Participation of others
- Reason it exists and/or is a priority?

What makes assessment of student learning and development successful here?
- How important is teamwork?
- Essential elements of practice?

Tell me about how you work or interact with your colleagues regarding assessment of student learning and development.
- What do you share – data or insights?
- What, if anything, is difficult to share?

What else do I need to know about assessment of student learning and development at this institution?