

## AN ABSTRACT OF THE THESIS OF

Jessica A. Martinez for the degree of Master of Science in College Student Services Administration presented on April 28, 2014.

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This thesis explored the experiences of four Student Affairs practitioners working within Multicultural Affairs (MA). The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine how professionals within MA offices were developing and conducting assessment as well as identify barriers they faced and best practices used. Data for this study was gathered through four semi-structured interviews with the participants. The coding process led to the following four themes (a) shifting cultures: bringing assessment to the forefront of the work, (b) people power: building a structure to support assessment, (c) communicating the value of multicultural affairs through assessment, and (d) grappling with how to produce assessment. Based on the findings of this study, the author suggests various steps professionals in MA could take to strengthen their work in assessment. This study begins to fill the current gap in literature; on how professionals in MA are developing and implementing assessment.

*Keywords:* assessment, Multicultural Affairs, Student Affairs, barriers, best practice

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A Critical Exploration of Assessment within Multicultural Affairs

by  
Jessica A. Martinez

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I understand that my thesis will become part of the permanent collection of Oregon State University libraries. My signature below authorizes release of my thesis to any reader upon request.

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Jessica A. Martinez, Author

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## A Critical Exploration of Assessment within Multicultural Affairs

### **Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study**

The role of assessment in higher education continues to be an evolving conversation. Currently, assessment is being used to evaluate programs, measure the effectiveness of initiatives, and help decide how funds should be allocated (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). This use of assessment is reflective of a need in higher education to hold administrators accountable, ensure transparency, and communicate the value and impact of initiatives to various stakeholders (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010; Schuh et al., 2001).

The assessment movement began taking shape in the 1970s and gained further momentum in the 1980s (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010; Schuh et al., 2001). The economic recession of the 1980s led to an increased demand for federal aid, causing the federal government to question the allocation of funds to institutions of higher education, and ultimately led to limits on the amount of federal aid given to institutions (Middaugh, 2010). This loss of funding required institutions of higher education to raise tuition costs, which in turn forced students and their families to question the value of investing in higher education (Middaugh, 2010). This critique of higher education continued in the 1990s, seeking a greater emphasis on transparency and accountability regarding the use of public funds and institutional effectiveness (Middaugh, 2010).

Various authors that have explored assessment in higher education have noted that at its inception, assessment was believed to be a passing trend— something that could be ignored until it went away (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010; Schuh et al.,

2001). However, over the past forty years, the demand for assessment in higher education has not subsided (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010; Schuh et al., 2001). External stakeholders such as state governments, accreditation agencies, and public opinion have continued to question institutions of higher education (Banta, 2002). As a result of these inquiries, Schuh and Upcraft (2001) identified the following questions as common inquiries those working in higher education have to be prepared to answer: “What is your college’s contribution to learning? Do your graduates know what you think they know, and can they do what your degrees imply? What do you intend for your students to know?” (p. 9). Today, higher education is still grappling with how best to provide assessment data that answers both the internal and external demands for accountability (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010; Schuh et al., 2001).

### **Implications for Student Affairs**

Student Affairs practitioners are not immune from the call to produce assessment (Erwin & Sivo, 2001; Banta, Jones and Black, 2009; Schuh et al., 2001). While Student Affairs practitioners like others in higher education, may have believed assessment to be a passing trend, it has become apparent that assessment will continue to be influential (Schuh et al., 2001). Schuh et al., (2001) frame the production of assessment as a means of survival; a way for Student Affairs practitioners to demonstrate the “importance and worth” of the profession (p.9). As administrators within higher education continue to engage in decision-making influenced by assessment, Student Affairs professionals have to be ready to answer the question, “Do we really need this service or program?” (Schuh et al., 2001). Within the context of Student Affairs, assessment tools may be used for several

things: to track the use of certain services, examine if students are satisfied with services offered, determine whether engagement with services are align with identified outcomes, and whether the quality of service aligns with comparable institutions, to name a few (Schuh et al., 2001).

Best practices in Student Affairs demand that professionals familiarize themselves with assessment practices and engage in collection of assessment data (Erwin and Sivo, 2001; Banta et al., 2009; Schuh et al., 2001). Multiple publications that influence the field of Student Affairs highlight the critical role of assessment (Sandeen & Barr, 2006). The *Student Learning Imperative* (Schroeder and Associates, 1996), *Good Practice in Student Affairs* (Blimling & Whitt, 1999) and the *Standards and Guidelines for Students Services Development Programs* (CAS Standards, 2006) all encourage Student Affairs practitioners to explicitly identify and assess student learning outcomes (Sandeen et al., 2006). Student Affairs professionals have largely moved away from questioning the necessity of conducting assessment and toward exploring how best to conduct assessment (Banta et al., 2009; Middaugh, 2010; Schuh & Associates, 2009).

Current literature, which will be explored in depth in Chapter Two, identifies multiple ways in which assessment data is being used within higher education (Erwin et al., 2001; Banta et al., 2009; Schuh et al., 2001). Assessment data has been used to measure student satisfaction with services provided, connect co-curricular student engagement with learning outcomes, and track how/if students are utilizing services (Erwin et al., 2001; Banta et al., 2009; Schuh et al., 2001). Schuh et al., (2001) state that assessment is political because the data collected through assessment has the

potential to greatly impact the direction of any given Student Affairs division.

Assessment data can be used to demonstrate why a certain program should be kept and conversely can provide reasons for terminating a program.

### **Research Question**

The focus of this study was to explore how assessment practices are developed and implemented by Student Affairs professionals, either *within* Multicultural Affairs offices or offering services *related to* Multicultural Affairs, with a specific focus on identifying barriers and best practices among current practitioners. Multicultural Affairs offices are charged with providing services to under-represented students and advocating for the interest of those students, while also raising awareness for the general campus community (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2009). The research questions guiding this study were 1) What kinds of assessment are practitioners within Multicultural Affairs utilizing? 2) What philosophies/theories/best practices guided the kinds of assessment used by a given office? and 3) Were there any specific barriers faced by practitioners when conducting assessment within the realm of Multicultural Affairs?

As the researcher, I specifically chose to focus this study on assessment in Multicultural Affairs for several reasons. First, as an undergraduate, the Multicultural Center on my campus served as a site for support as well as a place that expanded my awareness of issues of power and privilege. Subsequently, my interest in Student Affairs was piqued due to the transformative experiences I had in the Multicultural Center that institution. My professional interest is largely motivated by a personal connection to the mission and values of Multicultural Affairs.

Secondly, Multicultural Affairs, as a functional area within Student Affairs, provides an interesting site for assessment. Current assessment literature often highlights connecting services provided to student learning outcomes (Bresciani, Zelna & Anderson, 2004; Huba & Freed, 2000; Schuh et al., 2001). In some areas of Student Affairs, the connection between student involvement in a program and student learning seems apparent. Professionals in a Leadership Development office could reasonably construct various learning outcomes associated with the programs offered; these might include relating student involvement to increased knowledge of leadership styles, the ability to effectively lead others, and demonstrating an awareness of ethical considerations of being a leader.

Literature examining cultural centers often stressed the importance of these centers to the well-being of students (CAS Standards, 2006; Harper & Hurtado, 2007; Shotton, Yellowfish, & Cintrón, 2010; Yosso & Lopez, 2010). In Yosso and Lopez's (2010) examination of cultural centers they state that students report using cultural centers as places to deal with cultural shock and build community. Similarly, in their case study of services offered to Native American students at the University of Oklahoma, authors Shotton, Yellowfish, and Cintrón (2010), identify the Jim Thorpe Multicultural Center as a "home away from home, a meeting place for students, a safe haven, a place of healing, and a cultural center" (p. 54). This differential focus between Multicultural Affairs and other student services offered suggests that there may also be a difference in how assessment is conceptualized and implemented by Multicultural Affairs practitioners.

Further, an examination of current literature demonstrates limited specialized guidance for those working in Multicultural Affairs in terms of creating and implementing assessment. For those reviewing current literature, there are two main types of texts currently in circulation. The first are generalized guides that outline a uniformed approach to assessment (Banta et al., 2009; Erwin, 2001; Middaugh, 2010; Schuh et al., 2009). The second are case studies based on actual plans implemented by professionals (Banta, Lund, Black & Oblander, 1996; Schuh et al., 2001). However, in the text reviews for this thesis there were no case studies of how Multicultural Affairs practitioners conducted assessment. This led me, as the researcher, to believe that there is a gap in the literature pertaining to how professionals in Multicultural Affairs can successfully develop and implement assessment.

### **Definition of Key Terms**

The following section reviews definitions of key words and terms used throughout this thesis; definitions are based on those found in current literature.

- Assessment: “any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, divisional or agency effectiveness” (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 18).
- Evaluation: “any effort to use assessment evidence to improve institution, departmental, divisional or institutional effectiveness” (Upcraft et al., 1996, p. 19)

An illuminating example given by Upcraft and Shuh (2001) is that

“determining whether admissions criteria predict subsequent persistence and

degree completion is assessment...using that assessment to change admissions requirements is evaluation” (p.4). Within the scope of this thesis, my focus as the researcher was on assessment, as I looked into how assessment measures were developed and implemented. I was not specifically examining how these professionals were using the assessment data they collected.

- Student Affairs Practitioner: “staff members dedicated to the growth and development of students outside of the formal curriculum” (Schuh, Jones, Harper, & Associates, 2011, p. xi). The work of Student Affairs varies from campus to campus (Schuh et al., 2011). The definition provided above is intentionally broad in order capture the essence of the work that is done by Student Affairs practitioners. Offices that are staffed by Student Affairs professionals include, but are not limited to: orientation programs, career services, disability support services, counseling services, campus activities, academic advising, service-learning, student leadership and multicultural student services” (CAS Standards, 2006)
- Multicultural Affairs: “a functional area within higher education that varies but is often associated with providing services for “under-represented and oppressed students” by “advocating for changing policies, practices and attitudes of the campus...that inhibit student confidence and success” (CAS Standards, 2006).
- Oppression: “an interlocking, multileveled system that consolidates social power to the benefit of members of privileged groups and is maintained



and operationalized” on three dimensions: (a) contextual dimension, (b) conscious/unconscious dimension, and (c) applied dimension. The conceptual dimensions consist of three levels: (a) individual, (b) institutional, and (c) social/cultural. The conscious/unconscious dimension describes how oppression is both intentional and unintentional. The applied dimensions describe how oppression is manifested at the individual (attitudes and behaviors), institutional (policies, practices, and norms), and societal/cultural (values, beliefs, and customs) levels (Hardiman, Jackson, & Griffin, 2010, p. 26-27).

### **Organization of Study**

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One serves as the introduction of the study, providing an overview of the research topic, an explanation of the research questions, and a definition of key terms. Chapter Two contains the literature review for this study, providing pertinent background and contextual information for the topics explored throughout this study. Chapter Three provides an overview of the research design used to complete this study as well as a section exploring the researcher’s worldview. Chapter Four introduces the findings of this study according to the themes that emerged during data analysis. Finally, chapter Five provides a discussion of the study findings as well as concluding thoughts from the researcher.

## **Chapter 2: Literature Review**

In this chapter I will provide an overview of available literature pertaining to assessment in higher education. The three topics to be covered are: (a) the history of assessment in higher education, (b) conducting assessment in Student Affairs, and (c) an overview of the mission and purpose of Multicultural Affairs (MA). The topics covered were purposefully chosen to provide the reader with a general understanding of the basic concepts that influence the research topics. These three sections address trends in assessment and consider the impact of the intersection between the demand to produce assessment and the work done in MA.

### **Approach to Literature Review**

This literature review was conducted through the use of the Oregon State Valley library, including the digital holdings of this library. Through the Valley Library, the researcher was able to utilize materials from surrounding institutions through the use of Inter-Library Loan. The synopses found in the following sections were made after I gathered, read, and analyzed various materials including, published books and online peer-reviewed journal articles.

In order to gather these materials, I utilized the following key terms, at times combining multiple key terms to narrow my search: assessment, assessment models, assessment practices, Student Affairs, Multicultural Affairs, cultural centers, Multicultural Centers, diversity programs, diversity, college campuses, minority students, underrepresented students, historically underserved students, student learning, learning outcomes, and student development.

### **History of Assessment in Higher Education**

In order to understand the current culture of assessment within Student Affairs, it is necessary to understand why assessment became a tool within higher education. The conversation around the production of assessment within higher education began in the mid-1980s (Banta, 2002; Middaugh, 2010). The context of higher education at this time is a key to understanding why assessment has become a crucial part of higher education. Before 1980 higher education was experiencing a boom in attendance and governmental support (Middaugh, 2010). The maintenance of higher education at this time, as Middaugh (2010) states, “did not require a great deal of planning... [and] there were few questions as to how money was being spent” (p. 1).

However, the environment of higher education rapidly changed in the 1980s largely due to two main reasons: (a) reduction of governmental support, and (b) rise in public scrutiny (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010). The reduction of governmental support for higher education during this time was caused by rising demands on other sources of governmental aid (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010). Public funds were needed for improvements to public K-12 education and state infrastructure, the rising costs of Medicare and Medicaid, and the construction of incarceration facilities (Middaugh, 2010). These demands on governmental funds meant a decrease in monetary support for institutions of higher education, thus leading to the increase in tuition costs across the country (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010).

The rising cost of tuition was also an influential factor in creating the culture of assessment that is currently present in higher education (Banta, 2002; Middaugh

2010). As the cost of attending college rose, so did public discourse critiquing higher education (Middaugh, 2010). The main concerns raised were: the use of tuition dollars, the growth of the administration, the absence of systematic planning, and the worth of college degrees (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010). Entities from both outside and within the system of higher education began demanding an overall increase in transparency and accountability (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010).

Taken together, the decrease of governmental funding and the increase in critical public discourse gave rise to the production of assessment within higher education (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010). A central source of the demand for assessment data was the National Commission on the Cost of Higher Education created by Congress in 1998, which was charged with studying “the causes of spiraling tuition rates, administrative costs, and trend in faculty workload” (Middaugh, 2010, p. 7). Per the recommendations of the Commission, various governmental and educational agencies began demanding assessment data that reflected institutional cost effectiveness, student learning, and strategic planning (Middaugh, 2010). How institutions create and use assessment data is highly variable. However, engaging in assessment is commonly understood across higher education as being necessary and influential (Banta, 2002; Middaugh 2010; Schuh et al., 2001).

### **Assessment in Student Affairs**

As a function within higher education, Student Affairs is also subject to similar requests for transparency and accountability through assessment (Schuh et al., 2001). Within the context of Student Affairs, assessment can be used as a means to justify funding for a certain unit or program, demonstrate impacts on students,

measure affordability, determine the quality of services being offered, and shape policy changes, among other reasons. Many professionals writing about assessment regard the production of assessment as a means of survival; it is a way of communicating the importance and impact of services provided through Student Affairs (Erwin et al., 2001; Banta et al., 2009; Schuh et al., 2001). Because of the impact that assessment data can have, whether positive or negative, engaging in assessment is inherently political (Shuh, et al., 2001).

There are various types of assessment used within higher education (Erwin et al., 2001; Banta et al., 2009; Schuh et al., 2001). For example, tracking is a type of assessment that allows Student Affairs professionals to understand who is utilizing certain services (Schuh et al., 2001). Another form of assessment is needs assessment, which can help clarify if there is a gap in the services being offered or if certain services are necessary (Schuh et al., 2001; Soriano, 1995). Other types of assessments include satisfaction assessment, campus environment assessment and cost effectiveness assessment (Schuh et al., 2001).

One type of assessment that is widely discussed in academic literature is outcomes assessment, which focuses on the effect that engagement in services provided has on student learning outcomes (Bresciani et al., 2004; Huba et al., 2000; Schuh et al., 2001). This particular kind of assessment is widely discussed because “if learning is the primary measure of institutional productivity by which the quality of undergraduate education is determined, what and how much students learn must be the criterion by which the value of Student Affairs is judged (American College Personnel Association, 1994, p. 2)” (as cited in Schuh et al., 2001). Assessing student

learning outcomes requires Student Affairs professionals to link specific learning outcomes— often connected to learning outcomes defined in individual institutions— with student engagement in a particular program, then producing data to substantiate that connection (Schuh et al., 2001). The ability to connect engagement and learning with a certain Student Affairs service is viewed as one of the strongest ways to demonstrate the importance of Student Affairs departments on college campuses (Bresciani et al., 2004; Keeling, Wall, Underhile, & Dungy; 2008; Schuh et al., 2001).

**Principles of good practice.** The American Association for Higher Education published the *Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning* in 1992; these principles continue to guide practitioners today (Banta et al., 19996). The principles are as follows:

- (1) The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
- (2) Assessment is the most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
- (3) Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.
- (4) Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
- (5) Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
- (6) Assessment fosters wider improvements when representatives from across the education community are involved.
- (7) Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions about what people really care about.
- (8) Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
- (9) Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. (AAHE, 1992, pp. 2-3) (as cited in Banta et al., 1996)

While these guidelines have existed for over twenty years, the production of assessment continues to be a conversation among practitioners (Keeling et al., 2008;

Schuh et al., 2001; Shutt, Garrett, Lynch & Dean; 2012); suggesting a disconnect between the theory of conducting assessment and practice.

### **Multicultural Affairs in Higher Education**

The purpose of Multicultural Affairs (MA) offices on college campuses is to provide services specific to underrepresented populations (CAS Standards, 2006). The formation of MA offices can be traced back to the civil rights movement of the 1960s. When the enrollment of students of color increased, it became apparent that colleges and universities were unprepared to serve diverse student populations (Ballard, 1973; CAS Standards, 2006). The explicit purpose of MA offices is to increase the retention of historically underrepresented student populations (CAS Standards, 2006). The following section will outline the need for MA offices and the services they offer.

### **Experiences of Students of Color**

Students from unrepresented or underserved populations often report college campuses as hostile (Lozano, 2010; Harper et al., 2007; Smith, Allen, & Danley, 2007). In their study of campus racial climates, Harper and Hurtado (2007) document the experiences of students of color at five predominantly White universities. Students interviewed often expressed experiences involving “isolation, alienation and stereotyping” (Harper et al., 2007, 12). Swim (2003) conducted a similar study and found that of African American students interviewed, “thirty-six percent documented unfriendly looks and skeptical stares from White students...24 percent chronicled derogatory and stereotypical verbal remarks directed towards them [and] 18 percent kept a log of bad service...in the dining hall” (as cited in Harper et al., 2007, 13).

Beyond the unjust nature of these discriminatory encounters, research suggests that these types of hostile environments may also be psychologically harmful to students (Smith et al., 2007). In a study of the experiences of African-American men, Smith, Allen and Danley (2007) coined the term “racial battle fatigue” to describe the “result of constant physiological, psychological, cultural, [and] emotional coping” with racially insensitive and hostile situations (p. 556). As a result, African-American students tend to suffer from “tension headaches...inability to sleep...difficultly thinking...frustration...and emotional or social withdrawal (Smith et al., 2007, p. 556). While the Smith et al. study was limited to African-American men, the results of this study may be generalizable to other underrepresented student populations.

### **Role of Multicultural Affairs Offices**

Access and matriculation through higher education has historically and contemporarily served as an avenue by which citizens improve their livelihoods (Chesler, Lewis, & Crowfoot, 2005). However, not all student populations have been equally served by institutions of higher education, and this discrepancy has created specific barriers and challenges for specific marginalized student populations (Anderson, 2002; Chesler et al., 2005; Gamson & Arce, 1978; Williamson, 1999). The role of Multicultural Affairs offices is to serve underrepresented students in a variety of ways including the creation of cultural support systems, academic support, financial assistance counseling, study skills training, mentoring, tutoring, and advising (CAS Standard, 2006). Professionals in MA offices also strive to shift campus culture towards inclusion through educating the campus community and



changing institutional policies or practices that could negatively affect underrepresented student populations.

Research often relates the importance of these centers to the well-being of students (CAS Standards, 2006; Harper et al., 2007; Shotton et al., 2010; Yosso et al., 2010). Harper et al. (2007) found that that many students of color only felt connected to campus through the cultural centers they frequented (p. 18). These students often expressed resentment that the campus culture at large reflected what they considered to be White culture, even though their institution had policies that stated values of diversity and inclusion (Harper et al., 2007, p. 18). In Yosso and Lopez's (2010) examination of cultural centers, students reported using cultural centers as places to deal with cultural shock and build community. Similarly, in their case study of services offered to Native American students at the University of Oklahoma authors Shotton, Yellowfish, and Cintrón (2010), identified that the Jim Thorpe Multicultural Center served as a "home away from home, a meeting place for students, a safe haven, a place of healing, and a cultural center" (p. 54).

While some may question the necessity of MA offices within higher education, the Council for the Advancement of Standard in Higher Education asserts that strong MA offices are "essential to the retention and graduation rates of students...clearly institutions exhibit their commitment to providing quality education for all its students through the level of support they provide to MSPS [multicultural student programs]" (CAS Standards, 2006, p. 257).

**Conclusion**

In this chapter I outlined the history of assessment in higher education, how assessment is viewed within the context of Students Affairs, and the purpose of Multicultural Affairs (MA) offices. It should be noted that there was not a section reviewing literature pertaining to both conducting assessment and MA. At the time this study was conducted, the researcher was unable to find materials that specifically examined the ways in which assessment could or should be conducted within the context of MA Offices. These sections provided the reader with the basics for understanding the topics that influence the research questions of this study. Specifically, how do professionals in MA develop and implement assessment tools? Further, this study examines whether the unique mission of MA influences how professionals within MA approach conducting assessment.

### **Chapter 3: Methodology**

In this study, I examined how Multicultural Affairs professionals are developing and implementing assessment tools. This chapter will detail (a) the research design, (b) my worldview as the researcher, (c) participant and recruitment methods, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, (f) and limitations of the study. The primary purpose of this research is to identify ways in which practitioners develop and implement assessment tools. The secondary purpose is to identify factors that affect the collection of assessment data in Multicultural Affairs.

In order to gain rich data, I focused on the experiences of professionals working within the field of Multicultural Affairs who identified as having experience developing and implementing assessment plans. The questions that guided this research were: a) How are professionals within Multicultural Affairs developing and implementing assessment plans? and b) Are there common barriers or best practices experienced by those producing assessment in Multicultural Affairs?

#### **Research Design Overview**

A qualitative research design was purposefully chosen to examine the experiences of professionals developing and implementing assessment in Multicultural Affairs. First and foremost, I was drawn to qualitative methodology because of its core belief that truth is interpretive and that researchers are subjective (Holliday, 2002). Further, the qualitative method allowed me to highlight the experiences of participants through open-ended data collection methods in order to gain a “detailed understanding of a central phenomenon” (Creswell, 2009, p.51). Utilizing qualitative methods allowed for the inclusion of “intricate details about

phenomena such as feelings, through processes, and emotions that are difficult to extract or learn about through more conventional research methods” (Strauss and Corbin, 1998, p. 11). Finally, qualitative methodology was used because of its focus on producing work that “has direct... relevance for both nonacademic and academic audiences” (p. 6). The purpose of this study was not simply to gain an understanding of the phenomenon being studied, but to add to the body of knowledge of Student Affairs research.

**Research Methodology.** In this study I employed grounded theory as my strategy of inquiry. Creswell (2009) broadly defines grounded theory research as “systematic qualitative procedures that researchers use to generate a general explanation (called a grounded theory) that explains a process, action or interaction among people” (p. 438). Conducting grounded theory is characterized by “researchers’ persistent interaction with the data, while remaining constantly involved with their emerging analyses (Bryant & Charmaz, 2007)” (as cited in Jones, Torres, & Arminio, 2014, p. 76). The methodological foundations of grounded theory highly value a reciprocal relationship between the researcher and the study participant (Strauss & Corbin, 1994). Further, researchers who employ grounded theory have a responsibility to their participants to a) aptly represent the stories shared by participants and b) report back to participants on what was learned from the research process (Strauss et al., 1994).

Within the scope of grounded theory, I specifically followed the guide to grounded theory offered by Charmaz (2006) in *Constructing Grounded Theory*. This text provided a flexible outline of how to collect, analyze and report my data as well

as a comprehensive guide for completing a grounded theory study. Framing my research inquiry through the lens of grounded theory centered the experiences of participants and ensured that conclusions drawn emerged from the data collected.

**Researcher's Worldview.** As the researcher, I believe that the worldview I hold inherently has an effect on the research I conduct. Scholars from a variety of fields have lamented the need for researchers to recognize and name their perspective and how it influences their work (Creswell, 2012; Jones et al., 2014; Merriam, 2009). In my personal experience, this perspective has come from engaging in critical social studies including critical race theory and feminist theories. Authors like bell hooks, Michael Omi, Howard Winant, Patricia Hill Collins, Beverly Tatum, and Ronald Takaki have heavily influenced the lens through which I view the world, and thus the lens I bring to my research.

The worldview I hold is grounded in my understanding of oppression and the ways in which social systems are utilized to enact oppression. Hardiman, Jackson, and Griffin (2010) define oppression as an interlocking, multileveled system that consolidates social power to the benefit of members of privileged groups and is actively maintained and operationalized (p. 26). The presence of oppression creates a dichotomy of dominant and subordinate groups within society, where those in dominant positions are able to access societal power and privilege (Sensoy & DiAngelo, 2012; Tatum, 2010; Omi & Winant, 1994). Acknowledging and naming the impact of power and privilege has been a thematic constant within my educational background, and is a focus I maintain as a researcher.

As part of this worldview, I also focus on the impact and complexities of social identities. I subscribe to the belief that individuals hold multiple social constructed identities that interact and influence one another (Collins, 2000; hooks, 1984, Mohanty, 2004; Omi et al., 1994). Common social identities that are discussed within social justice focused literature are class, sex, race, sexual orientation, gender, religion, age, and ability (Hardiman et al., 2010). All individuals have membership within these social categories and, because of these multiple sites of membership, may embody experiences of both dominance and subordination (Hardiman et al., 2010). Thus, for me as a researcher, it is important to recognize the multidimensionality of identity in the hopes that doing so will allow my participants to bring their whole selves to the research I engage in.

**Use of Critical Social Theory.** While my personal worldview has been built upon various theoretical premises, some of which are defined above, it is important to note that these perspectives are grounded in the wider canon of Critical Social Theory (CST). CST has been defined as “a multidisciplinary framework with the implicit goal of advancing the emancipatory function of knowledge” (Leonardo, 2004, p. 11). The foundation of Critical Social Theory is widely associated with the Frankfurt School’s “study of a Kantian theory of knowledge coupled with Freudo-Marxist theory of modern society” (Leonardo, 2004, p.11). The “critical” in CST is largely believed to have stemmed from the critiques of reason, ethics and beauty introduced by Immanuel Kant (Leonardo, 2004). Being that CST is grounded in “producing knowledge that centers criticism,” the connection between the works of those that study the impact of power and privilege, such as the theorists that founded and

continue to write for feminists studies, critical race studies and post-colonial studies, becomes clear (Leonardo, 2004). While these theorists may have different foci they all are grounded in the belief that criticisms illuminate the socially constructed power structures that effect our perceptions of reality.

### **Participant and Recruitment Method**

My goal in this study was to interview up to eight Student Affairs professionals with experience in assessment within Multicultural Affairs. This number of participants was chosen to allow for an in-depth focus on the experiences shared through the interview process. The data for this study was gathered through interviews with four participants. These professionals represented a variety of institutions comprised of different institutional types and located in different geographically regions; further demographic details on the participants can be found in Chapter Four.

Recruitment for this study began after gaining approval for the Institutional Review Board (IRB) in November 2013. Recruitment was conducted via professional list-servs and informal professional networks. The attached recruitment letter (Appendix A) was sent out via networks that relate to the following interest areas: (1) Student Affairs, (2) Multicultural Affairs, and/or (3) Assessment within Student Affairs. The recruitment letter was distributed by Allison Davis White-Eyes, the study's principle investigator and myself, the student researcher. Snowball sampling was employed; when the recruitment letter was sent, it was suggested that potential participants forward the information on to potentially interested colleagues, thus widening the potential pool of participants for the study. Professionals who responded

to the recruitment letter were provided with an 'Additional Information' document (Appendix B) that outlined the purpose of the study, expectations of participants, confidentiality and voluntariness. Once participants reviewed the provided information, they were invited to schedule a private one-on-one interview.

Participants in this study were Student Affairs professionals working within the field of Multicultural Affairs. Participant involvement was limited to those who met all of the following criteria: They must have (a) worked within the field of Multicultural Affairs for at least two years, (b) been aware of current assessment practices at their institutions in relation to Multicultural Affairs, and (c) felt comfortable speaking about the development and/or implementation of assessment practices with Multicultural Affairs. These restrictions were used to limit participation to those individuals who were prepared to respond to the research topic in a manner that directly responded to the research questions guiding this study.

### **Data Collection**

Data for this study was collected by conducting four semi-structured interviews with Student Affairs professionals working in Multicultural Affairs. These interviews lasted approximately thirty minutes each and were guided by seven open-ended questions outlined in my IRB protocol (Appendix C). I intentionally used a semi-structured interview format in order to acknowledge that "the individual respondents define the world in unique ways" (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). By working with semi-structure interview questions, I was able to frame the topic of inquiry but allow the participants to include data-rich information that may have been missed if I had used more structured interview questions.



All interviews began with participants confirming that they had reviewed the “Additional Information” document (Appendix B). Participants were then asked a series of questions concerning confidentiality, voluntariness and consent. After these topics were reviewed, the semi-structured interviews began. Each interview was digitally recorded and transcribed with the names of participants and their institutions recorded with a pseudonym assigned by myself. Additionally, I took notes during the interviews and wrote memos during the coding process to track themes, connections and areas of further examination.

### **Data Analysis**

The data from this study was examined through constant comparative analysis; meaning that as the researcher I continually compared and contrasted data points (Charmaz, 2006). For this study I used memo-writing and coding as my primary means of analysis. I kept track of my reflections and analytical thoughts throughout the research process through a form of memo-writing (Merriam, 2009). During the research process, I took notes during interviews regarding points being made by the participants. I often made quick notations regarding the way in which specific comments made by interviewees related or fit within the greater context of my study. I continued to create memos during the transcription and coding process. While I transcribed the audio data from the interviews, I kept a notepad next to my computer to allow me to record any reflections or analysis I had during this process. I also used memo writing to contemplate potential codes and themes. Writing these memos allowed me to do the following: a) track my thought process throughout data

collection and data analysis, b) explore potential connections within and between my data set, and c) provide me with the overall space to critically engage with my data.

The coding process I used to analyze my data consisted of three parts: a) line-by-line coding, b) focused coding, and c) theoretical coding. My first round of coding was conducted through line-by-line coding. The purpose of line-by-line coding is to challenge the researcher to stay open to the nuances present in the data (Charmaz, 2006). Following the line-by-line coding, I coded the transcripts again using focused coding. Focused coding allowed me to synthesize and group similar codes together. Finally, I coded my transcripts a third time using theoretical coding which resulted in the themes explored in Chapter Four.

Additionally, to maintain validity of the results asserted by this study, a two-step member checking process was employed. Participants were contacted once the transcription of their interview was completed. Participants were invited to review their transcripts and ensure that all views captured were reflective of what they shared. This process also allowed participants to clarify specific points of the recording that were indistinct on the records gathered. Participants were contacted again once the final themes were elucidated. Participants were asked if the themes spoke to their experience and they were invited to offer comments to the researcher. Of the four participants, three affirmed that the themes aligned with their experiences and the fourth did not reply to the researcher's inquiry.

### **Limitations of Study**

This study was created to address current gaps in literature concerning how assessment is produced by Student Affairs professionals in Multicultural Affairs. While the findings of this study highlighted shared barriers and best practices, the researcher was aware of several limitations inherent in this study. Limitations identified by the researcher include: (a) a limited sample size, (b) relying on data from a single type of data collection, and (c) engaging in only one round of interviews.

The final number of participants for this study was four, which may not aptly represent the practices of professionals around the nation. Further, the conclusions drawn from the data shared by these participants were solely collected through the interview process. Additional materials could have been collected to strengthen the data analysis. For example, gathering institutional policies regarding assessment, gathering assessment materials used by the participants and their respective departments, and utilizing reports based on assessments conducted by these professionals. Finally, the data collection in the study could have been deepened by creating the possibility for scheduling multiple rounds of interviews with the participants. This practice would have provided the opportunity to review initial data collected and produce another round of interview questions, informed by the answers collected in the first round, in order to gather more in-depth data to address the research questions.

**Summary**

This chapter reviewed (a) the research design, (b) my worldview as the researcher, (c) participant and recruitment methods, (d) data collection, (e) data analysis, (f) and limitations of the study. The data for this study was collected through four semi-structured interviews that were conducted over the phone and in person. Participants were professionals working in Multicultural Affairs who met a number of criteria to ensure rich data were collected. The data collected was constantly compared utilizing a three step coding process and memo-writing, which resulted in the identification of four themes. The findings of this study will be reviewed in the next chapter.

## Chapter 4: Results

This study focused on gaining a deeper understanding of how practitioners in Multicultural Affairs were developing and implementing assessment, as well as attempting to identify best practices and barriers experienced by these professionals. The following chapter will provide a review of the results of this study which will include (a) a description of the participants and their institutions, (b) the thematic categories found during analysis, and (c) a detailed overview of those themes.

The primary questions guiding this study were: 1) What kinds of assessment are practitioners within Multicultural Affairs utilizing? 2) What philosophies/theories/best practices guided the kinds of assessment used by a given office? and 3) Were there any specific barriers practitioners faced when conducting assessment within the realm of Multicultural Affairs? The analysis of the data collected in this study resulted in four themes that address the research questions, which will be covered in depth later in the chapter. The themes found were:

- shifting cultures: bringing assessment to the forefront of the work;
- people power: building a structure to support assessment;
- communicating the value of multicultural affairs through assessment;  
and
- grappling with how to produce assessment.

While these themes will be covered in separate sections, they should not be viewed as independent from one another; instead they should be understood as interconnected and related. These themes were chosen because of their ability to speak to the core of

stories shared in the interviews. The themes will be grounded in the narratives of the participants by providing direct quotes and narratives shared during the interviews.

### **Participants**

The data for this study was gathered through four one-on-one interviews. All of the participants met the following enrollment requirements: they (a) worked within the field of Multicultural Affairs with at least 2 years of experience, (b) were aware of current assessment practices at their institution in relation to Multicultural Affairs, (c) felt comfortable speaking about the development and/or the implementation of assessment practices within Multicultural Affairs, and (d) were of age, in their state of employment, to provide legal consent to for participation. While it was not a requirement for enrollment, all participants represented different institutions in different geographical regions of the United States.

In the interest of confidentiality, certain steps were taken to lessen the risk of identifying the participants and their institutions. All participants and their institutions were assigned pseudonyms. Further, names of programs and units were changed in an attempt to minimize the possibility of identifying the institutions the participants worked at. While demographic information was gathered about the participant's institutions, the information was kept general in order to provide context but not identify the institution.

Participant information is organized in the following table (Table 1) based on the pseudonyms assigned to them. The following information was included in Table 1: (a) pseudonym, (b) geographic location, (c) institution type, and (c) institution size.

Table 1

*Participant Information*

<b>Name</b>	<b>Geographic Location</b>	<b>Institution Type</b>	<b>Institution Size</b>
Gabriel Davis	Northeast	Faith-Based	Small
Henry Lopez	Midwest	Public	Large
Michelle Torrez	Midwest	Research Based	Large
Renne Young	Pacific Northwest	Research Based	Large

**Gabriel Davis.** Gabriel currently works in a director position in Multicultural Affairs at a small faith-based institution in the Northeast. Gabriel shared that while he understands the importance of assessment, his office does not currently have a comprehensive assessment plan. His office does, however, collect assessment data through a variety of methods, including: one on one interviews, small focus groups, and both electronic and paper surveys. Gabriel identified that one of the major barriers to conducting assessment is a lack of human resources, which makes assessment more of an afterthought than a primary focus.

**Henry Lopez.** Henry works in a directorial capacity in Multicultural Affairs at a large public institution in the Midwest. Henry shared that his office is in the process of trying to build an assessment program but that they are not currently heavily using assessment. Indicators tracked by this include: GPAs and retention rates of students who utilize the services this office provides, and attendance to programs. While Henry emphasized that he would like to use assessment as a form of

storytelling, his office is currently focused on gathering data on their programs in order to better understand the population that they are serving. At the conclusion of my interview with Henry, he stressed that assessment is a critical component of Multicultural Affairs since assessment data could be used to protect against budget cuts.

**Michelle Torrez.** Michelle is an Assistant Director in Multicultural Affairs at a large research university in the Midwest. Part of Michelle's role is to act as a consultant to others in her office to assist in their development of assessment tools in conjunction with a central assessment office. In her interview, Michelle emphasized the importance of developing strong learning outcomes and creating manageable assessment surveys, and she identified conducting assessment as a vital component of the work of Multicultural Affairs. Michelle's unit currently collects assessment through a combination of surveys (online and paper) and focus groups. Michelle is also in charge of compiling the assessment data collected throughout the year into an annual report that is submitted to the Division of Student Affairs.

**Renne Young.** Renne is a program coordinator within a Multicultural Affairs department at a large research institution in the Pacific Northwest. During Renne's interview, she compared and contrasted the assessment approaches of three different institutions at which she has worked over the course of her career. Renne noted that her current department does not presently have a comprehensive assessment plan, resulting in the various units within that department conducting assessment in a disjointed manner. Renne emphasized the importance of grounding assessment in a department's mission statement, as well as being open to developing creative



assessment tools., Renne recounted various assessment experiences gained while working at multiple institutions; in her current position she identified the use of surveys and focus groups and is also trying some new creative assessment approaches that were planned in conjunction with the institution's Centralized Assessment Office.

### **Research Analysis**

After transcribing all of my interviews I began the analysis process. For this study I employed a grounded theory methodology, which provided an outline for analysis. This analytic process including a three part coding process: line-by-line coding, focused coding and finally theoretical coding; as well as memo writing. As a result of this analysis I was able to identify four themes that captured the core of what was shared in my interviews. The themes are where (a) shifting cultures: bringing assessment to the forefront of the work, (b) people power: building a structure to support assessment, (c) communicating the value of Multicultural Affairs through assessment, and (d) grappling with how to produce assessment. The following sections will explore each of these themes through quotes and narratives shared during the interviews.

#### **Shifting cultures: Bringing Assessment to the Forefront of the Work**

A common experience that was shared during the interview process was the need for these professionals to actively create an environment that placed assessment at the center of their work. This manifested in a number of ways that will be explored in this section.

However, before sharing those pieces, I think it's important to name that this theme of "shifting cultures" connotes that there is something that these professionals are trying to move away *from*. While I did not specifically ask my participants about how they or their departments perceive assessment, two interviewees explicitly shared comments that would suggest a negative perception of assessment. This was briefly touched on by Michelle who at the end of her interview shared about staff buy-in, and stated "I think also too there a sorta bigger issue about the culture of assessment." This was further explored in Renne's interview, who shared "I think it's unfortunate that there's a stigma around assessment; um because to me, I code it as a way to tell our story...it's a way to get the resources that we need". What these two comments hint at is a current culture that would hinder the completion of assessment, which suggests that this is the culture that these practitioners are actively trying to shift towards one that centers assessment.

When these practitioners spoke about their work in regards to assessment, they largely identified that their departments are currently in a developmental stage; they are at a place of building a culture of assessment. The practitioners specifically stated that they are currently working to place assessment at the center of the work they are doing instead of treating it as an afterthought. When asked about his department's approach to assessment, Gabriel stated that:

I think, you know, we follow our institution's desire to be as uh assessment focused and oriented as possible; um, so I think we try our best to assess all of our standing programs and initiatives as they occur and we are working hard toward a more comprehensive assessment of the work that we do in Multicultural Affairs.

This quote communicated two things to me as the researcher: (1) it names the institutional value placed on assessment, and (2) it highlights that while Gabriel is currently collecting assessment data on a programmatic level, he wants to move towards a more systematic approach for collective assessment across his unit. Also present in Gabrielle's quote is a statement that his department is currently in a developmental stage of assessment, something that was shared by others in this study.

For example, Michelle shared:

In terms of the culture here, I think its developing, I guess is the best way to say; is to say trying to make it [assessment] a given for the work rather than sort of this thing that we have to do as a chore (Michelle).

In another part of her interview Michelle expanded on the development of this culture towards valuing assessment, stating that:

One of the things that I have tried to work [with] the staff on is trying to make assessment sorta vital or an integral part of their programming and everything that we do. Um, which I think a lot of what was done beforehand didn't have that in the back of their mind (Michelle).

Renne, also shared that her department is currently working to build a stronger assessment program, again moving towards centering the assessment component of their work. When asked how assessment data is currently being collected she shared:

It depends; if a person feels inclined to assess their program they submit it or they retinker their program based on assessment....but there's no plan, there's no comprehensive way, which I know certain people are going to be changing in our program but that has yet to [be] seen.

This quote reinforces the perception that conducting assessment is currently in a state of flux, wherein departments are attempting to highlight the importance of assessment and organize a uniform way of conducting it.

In order to assist this movement of assessment from the status of an afterthought to being a fundamental part of their work practitioners also highlighted the importance of staff buy-in. Two interviewees, Michelle and Gabriel, explicitly identify staff buy-in as a main component of their work in shifting the current culture of assessment in their offices. Michelle states that:

If I can't get the staff to buy in like then there's not a shot in hell that its actually going to work...And so hopefully, going forward um once it becomes more of the culture here it just becomes something that we do...so, starting this position, I've been really trying to um work on sorta changing that culture and getting that piece.

Gabriel also shared that as new staff join his team, he is trying to portray to those new staff members that assessment needs to be at the center of their work, in effect creating a new culture because these individuals will have a different context that highlights the importance of assessment.

So, um I really think as we introduce new people to our staff, I think a lot of our emphasis and motivation is to make sure that they take an active role is assessing the work that we do as an office (Gabriel).

These comments by Michelle and Gabriel highlight the important role that a staff plays in creating an environment that recognizes and supports the need for assessment.

### **People Power: Building a Structure to Support Assessment**

A second theme that emerged from my data revolved around structures needed to support the production of assessment. The term 'people power' was used by multiple participants to name their needs around staffing and their capacity to produce assessment. Throughout the course of their interviews some participants

identified structures that supported their production of assessment; while others expressed a need for their department to develop structural support.

**Structural Barriers.** In the following section I will identify the ways in which participants expressed concern regarding the structural support present in their departments. Taken together these experiences suggest that Multicultural Affairs units hoping to conduct assessment may need to consider the ways in which additional staffing may be needed to support this endeavor. For example when asked about how assessment was being conducted in his office Gabriel stated:

I think the challenge is, uh I think as most people would um identify with respect to assessment sometimes, it's just a matter of time. Um, there's a lot to do um, and most of your human resource is dedicated to that doing, particularly in relation to our students, and often uh some of the assessment, just you know, it is an afterthought.

In this instance, Gabriel identified that, as a practitioner, there is a need to recognize the additional work that can accompany the production of assessment data. While in the previous section I highlighted the ways that practitioners are trying to ingrain assessment into their unit's structure, creating assessment tools and conducting assessment is also time consuming and may require practitioners to adjust how their staff spend their time. Highlighting the importance of staffing units to account for the time needed to focus on assessment, Gabriel, who shared that time was one of the main barriers to producing assessment, later in his interview shared that his office would be hiring an additional staff member to assist in the development and implementation of assessment; stating "you know, we're certainly doing more

[assessment]; um, we recently hired a program coordinator on a part-time basis in our office, who, a big part of her responsibility is focused on assessment” (Gabriel).

This concern about people power, or having the staff to support the production of assessment, was reiterated by Renne, who in her interview shared:

At a lot of institutions Multicultural Affairs units are doing so much with so little they don't have time to tell their stories, right; um they're practitioners on the ground putting out fires for every kind of student, with any kind of issue, and it takes a lot of time to craft this is what's going on, this is how many people I'm serving.

In this quote Renne identified that breadth of work that can fall within the duties of a practitioner within a Multicultural Affairs unit, and she questioned how these practitioners can be expected to complete their work and invest time in assessment.

Renne furthered her point by stating “some of these practitioners... feel so inundated and not supported, and [think] how could I even spend time doing assessment when I'm doing all these other things.” The experiences of these two practitioners suggested that in order to incorporate assessment into these Multicultural Affairs units, there is also a need to identify the human resources required to support these assessment initiatives.

**Supportive Structures:** Conversely, there were practitioners that identified structures in their units and their institutions that support the production of assessment data. One participant in particular, Michelle seemed to, from the information provided to me, come from the institution that provided the most support. During the course of her interview Michelle shared about the various ways in which the Student Affairs department and the Multicultural Affairs unit support the production of assessment. Firstly, she shared about her own position, stating:

I assist diversity assessment, there's also a half time graduate assistant that, whose role is primary assessment, And, so how it works is we, she and I, are sorta the consultants um, so you know we will go out to the staff when they want to do an assessment, help them develop their learning outcomes” (Michelle).

Michelle also went on to share:

I think it's also important to note too that we also um work with the [Centralized Assessment Office] which is within the division um of Student Life... and so they oversee assessment for all student life. Um, and so they're sorta our consultants within the office so when we need a survey made, we go to them to make the survey but we are still...the graduate assistant and I develop that, we develop the items for that survey but we can go to them and they can help us refine those further and, like I said, give us the materials that we need.

From these quotes, it became clear that of my participants, Michelle's institution had the most structures in place to assist her unit in creating, implementing and analyzing assessment. In terms of *people power*, Michelle identifies that in the unit she works in, there are at least two people— herself and the graduate assistant— who focus on assessment. Additionally, a centralized office within the Division of Student Affairs assists with the assessment process. Compared to the experiences shared in the previous section, it becomes clear that these structures may work to eliminate some of the stresses shared by those participants whose units and divisions did not have this kind of support.

Renne also shared the impact a centralized assessment office could have on a unit's assessment process. While Renne shared that her unit does not currently have an assessment plan she, as a program coordinator, is working on implementing regular assessment. When asked about the assessment approach she uses for her program she shared “My approach is to contact [my Colleague] and [my Colleague]

and work with them directly...ultimately the people who ask me the most, the best questions come from our Assessment Office and it's a huge resource to have them." Michelle's and Renne's experiences with centralized assessment offices highlight the fact that support for assessment does not have to come from within Multicultural Affairs office; support can also come from centralized assessment offices with the division of Student Affairs.

### **Communicating the Value of Multicultural Affairs Through Assessment**

The third theme that emerged from the data was an attitudinal barrier. The views shared by participants suggested that, in general, institutions of higher education fail to value the work of Multicultural Affairs offices and that assessment provides practitioners a means through which to demonstrate their significance.

In their interviews, both Renne and Gabriel expressed that institutions of higher education were not created to serve, and continue to underserve, students of color, and as a result fail to value the necessity of Multicultural Affairs offices.

During Renne's interview she shared:

You know, universities were not intent- were not built for Multicultural Affairs units, we happened as a product of some messed up stuff that happens in university because they couldn't figure out how to be inclusive from the beginning. So the other thing they don't teach us, is how to work in a framework that is not ours, so we're going counterculture and we're going against homogeny from the beginning and if we were taught better from assessment people how to really how to really articulate or really even think about this in a healthy way then then I think um we could do it better.

In this quote Renne questions the impact of the historical structure of higher education naming that practitioners in Multicultural Affairs may struggle to find a voice within institutions that were not created to support the work being done in these spaces. Gabriel shared a similar viewpoint commenting asserting:



You know, we look at the forefront of where we see growth in our populations in this country um, it's in those demographics groups that have traditionally, you know, been considered the underrepresented, minority, multicultural groups; so, I think that it's imperative that our institutions pay more attention, or start paying attention more um, to Multicultural Affairs in a very broad institutions context, um more so then perhaps some of us are currently doing.

Taken together, Renne and Gabriel asserted that, both historically and currently, certain student populations have been underrepresented and underserved. Both interviewees raise questions concerning the ways in which practitioners in Multicultural Affairs can assist in shifting the historical marginalization that certain students face.

Further, Henry and Michelle drew very clear connections between assessment and budgetary funding. Layering these perspectives with the ones shared by Renne and Gabriel suggested that not only do certain student populations continue to be underserved but, connected to that, the work of Multicultural Affairs, in general, is undervalued. In his interview Henry shared:

I think it's critical for offices like ours to be collect[ing] this information um and to have and to go out with the story. I think that uh that it's all too easy in our environment to think about ways of, you know, cutting back um and particularly cutting back on services for students of color, many people feel, you know, those services aren't needed any more... I think we have to be able to explain why those services are needed and how they're useful.

Specifically, these realizations connected the development and implementation of assessment tools with budgetary support from their institutions. This focus from my participants suggested that without assessment these units would be at risk of losing part or all of their funding. In the above quote, Henry explicitly named that assessment data can be used as a way to validate the work of those within Multicultural Affairs. Further, he suggested that, without this kind of data,

Multicultural Affairs units could be at risk of being eliminated since the larger institution may not understand the impact these kinds of units can have. Henry was not the only participant to express concern about the sustainability of Multicultural Affairs units without assessment. Michelle stated:

The other thing is, is that I think that, it's just going to be so much more tied to funding and availability of resources... particularly when you talk about a Multicultural Affairs Office, cause we're often the first that can go in a budget cut, so...I just think it's just vital to our success and vitality as a center.

Similar to Henry's assertion about the importance of assessment, Michelle also identified assessment data as a means through which practitioners in Multicultural Affairs can communicate the value of their work to those outside of their specific unit.

### **Grappling with How to Produce Assessment**

The final theme that emerged in my study was that practitioners in Multicultural Affairs continue to grapple with how to best develop and implement assessment data that speaks to the work that they do. In the following section I will identify specific aspects of the participants' process in order to name where participants were experiencing barriers as well as processes that they have created to assist in their assessment planning.

**Qualitative vs. quantitative methods.** One aspect of assessment planning that participants focused on was deciding when and how to use various collection techniques. Specifically, there seemed to be a need to balance assessment data between qualitative and quantitative methodologies. Quantitative methods allow practitioners to collect numeric data, whereas qualitative tools allow for the collection of narrative based data.

Some participants, like Henry, focused on exploring how to balance the two methodologies stating “I think it’s really important to tell our stories, and to tell our stories in narrative form but to tell them...with numbers”. This balancing of qualitative and quantitative methodologies was also reflected in Michelle’s interview. When asked what assessment tools would best allow for a holistic representation of the quality of services being accessed by students Michelle stated that “For me, like I do think that it’s a qualitative and quantitative thing. I think as a center, in the past, we’ve done a really good job of...capturing the qualitative but not necessarily the quantitative.” Both of these quotes highlighted what I perceived as a tension between providing narrative pieces while also being able to “back up” those stories with numeric data that may be perceived as stronger evidence of progress. This was illustrated in Renne’s interview when she recounted the assessment approach taken at a previous institution stating:

I was like “I’m measuring stuff, I know that my students...are transformative leaders, I’m good” And um, you know the VP at this institution, she came from a very rigid assessment background and she wanted to see numbers, she wanted to see um if students had transformed how they did that.

These examples demonstrate what I perceived as a tension between narrative assessment data and numeric based assessment data, resulting in a need for qualitative data to be supported by quantitative data.

**Need for clarity.** Another conversation that arose pertaining to the production of assessment was the need for clarity. Both Michelle and Renne focused, at various parts of their interviews, on the need for assessment to be driven by clear program goals and the use of learning outcomes. When asked about the philosophy that grounds her assessment work Michelle shared:

I guess it's not really a philosophy per se but like I said, I want all the staff to have learning outcomes. But also develop basic, good learning outcomes because um, some that's measurable and can actually be assessed. Um, and so just going back to the basics, you know, and teaching just the basic learning outcomes like theories just to be able to do that piece.

Later in her interview when she shared about how assessment is collected in her office, Michelle shared that as part of her job, she works as a consultant who “go [es] out to staff when they want to do an assessment [and] help them develop their learning outcomes.” Further, at the conclusion of her interview, Michelle shared that as her office continues to develop a culture of assessment she hopes to develop “learning outcomes for every program then, to me, I think the assessment is easy if you have good learning outcomes,” which highlighted the fact that she places learning outcomes at the center of her assessment approach.

Similarly, Renne also commented on the need to establish clear program goals and learning outcomes in order to collect appropriate assessment data. When asked what types of assessment would best represent the work being done in Multicultural Affairs Renne stated:

So, I kinda go back to, you know, you can only assess something if your program mission is clear, if your goals are clear...before you can get to the tool [assessment] you gotta get to the what, you know, what are you saying you want to do and how are you doing that.

Renne's unit is currently working on developing a new mission and vision and she went on to state how she believes that those core pieces of the unit need to be finalized before they can begin gathering strong assessment data. She later shared that gathering assessment data that is highly varied can be an indicator that a program does not have a clear direction, saying:

If you're doing a bunch of assessment and it's all totally different, you know, if you say you have this one common mission or vision, you've got all this different data that shows you something totally different then you need to go back and revisit the purpose and I, I think we're back at this place of starting from that place so we can create the instruments.

Beyond having clear mission statements and learning outcomes, participants also spoke about the need to create assessment tools that are clear and concise. In her interview Michelle shared the following quote on assessment tools:

We also want to capture as many voices as we can um, and I think another consideration is, if you're going to be the quantitative piece, is to do something this is um quick. Cause, you know what happens is...these surveys that...may take an hour to complete and they get like a ten percent completion rate, which I often just question in my head how valid those results are. And so, one thing that I've been very passionate about is trying to develop assessment methods that are practical.

Later in Michelle's interview, she continued to discuss the necessity of clear and concise assessment tools, stating, "The surveys that we do, the paper surveys, I'm very adamant should be no more than one page front and back that that includes the demographic data." This focus on creating assessment tools that are concise was reiterated by Renne, who when asked about how she creates assessment tools shared

They're [Colleagues in Assessment Office] really holistic thinkers, they want to know, they really want to ask just one question, and the right one, and not one question with like five parts but one question with one, you know, very short sentence um but it's getting me to think about how to assess programs better.

Taken together, these quotes from Renne and Michelle highlight a specific focus on gathering assessment through instruments, like surveys, that are clear, focused, and concise.

## **Summary**

In this section I outlined the themes that emerged from the data collected through this study. The themes identified were (a) shifting cultures, (b) people power: building a structure to support assessment, (c) communicating the value of Multicultural Affairs through assessment, and (d) grappling with how to produce assessment. Taken together these themes highlight the current issues that were shared during the interview process that have impacted how this practitioners development and implement assessment. In the following chapter I will discuss these results as well as present recommendations based on the data gathered.

## **Chapter 5: Discussion and Conclusion**

In this study I examined the experiences of four Student Affairs practitioners working in Multicultural Affairs offices. The focus of this study was to identify how assessment is currently being conducted and identify barriers and best practices that influenced how these practitioners developed and implemented assessment tools. Based on the themes explored in the previous chapter, this chapter will include the following sections (a) discussion of the findings, (b) general conclusions, (c) considerations for practice, (d) limitations, (c) recommendations for future research and, (d) concluding thoughts.

### **Discussion of the Findings**

For this study I interviewed four practitioners working in Multicultural Affairs and discussed their approaches to the development and implementation of assessment in the hopes of identifying common barriers and best practices. While all of my participants represented different institutions, geographical regions and institutional types, there were common experiences shared. As a whole, the participants of this study understood the importance of collecting assessment, viewed assessment as a way to tell others about the work they do and the students they serve, and identified that they are still working on developing assessment approaches that details how they develop, gather and use assessment data. While the institutions and resources available to these practitioners differed they consistently shared more barriers than

best practices. This finding suggested to me, as the researcher, and was actually stated by a number of my participants, that there needs to be a further exploration of how to create assessment within the context of Multicultural Affairs.

### **General Conclusions**

Based on the findings of this study, the following section will focus on answering the research question that guided this study; which was to identify barriers and best practices faced by those in Multicultural Affairs when they developed and implemented assessment.

**Barriers to conducting assessment.** Broadly speaking, practitioners identified three barriers as affecting their ability to develop and implement assessment. The first was that they lacked the staffing or people power to conduct assessment in addition to their other duties. For example, Renne broadly spoke about seeing practitioners in Multicultural Affairs that “feel so inundated” trying to balance the demands of serving students and think “how could I even spend time doing assessment when I’m doing all these other things”. This viewpoint was shared by Gabriel who shared “I think the challenge is...as most people would...with to respect assessment sometimes, it’s just a matter of time. There’s a lot to do um, and most of your human resource is dedicated to that doing”. So as these practitioners are communicating that assessment is vital to their work, they are also realizing that to some extent there may also be a need to add additional staff in order to account for the added time it takes to develop, implement and analyze assessment data.

The second was that as leaders in their units, these practitioners also struggled to get other staff to “buy-in” to the importance of assessment. This led to practitioners



identifying that within their units they were working on organizing a cultural shift regarding assessment. Practitioners like Gabriel identified that in the past assessment has often been viewed as an afterthought and he is currently working within his unit to change that approach to assessment and really integrate assessment into his work. Renne also spoke about this attempt to shift the culture of assessment, questioning “how can we use assessment to be that that we think we are, so we say we’re about community, how do we wrap assessment into being community?” Further, Michelle identified that assessment is something that she understands to be vital to the sustainability of the Multicultural Affairs office she works for, but similarly identified that a major part of her job was attempting to integrate assessment into the work being done stating that she is “trying to make it [assessment] sorta a given for the work rather than sorta this thing that we have to do as a chore”. A major barrier that these practitioners seem to be facing is creating a work culture where assessment is placed at the center of the work, instead of being some addition or afterthought.

A final barrier that seemed to affect these practitioners was working within a larger institution that suggested to them that their work was inessential. For example, Michelle in her interview shared that she believes assessment needs to be vital, and she is working to integrate assessment into the structure of her unit because

I think its [assessment] just going to be so much more tied to funding and availability of resources...particularly when you talk about Multicultural Affairs Offices, cause we’re often the first that can go in a budget cut...I just think it’s vital to our successes and vitality as a center.

Michelle was not the only interviewee to draw a connection between assessment data and budget cuts; Henry also stated:

I think it's critical for offices like ours to be collect[ing] this information um and to have and to go out with the story. I think that uh that it's all too easy in our environment to think about ways of, you know, cutting back um and particularly cutting back on services for students of color, many people feel, you know, those services aren't needed any more...I think we have to be able to explain why those services are needed and how they're useful.

It is important to note that both of these responses came at the end of the interview in response to the question "is there anything else you would like to share?" I believe that this is important because I think that these two responses may be representative of a larger assumption in higher education, that Multicultural Affairs offices are unnecessary or dispensable.

While I didn't ask these participants to clarify why they believe their offices would be the first to go in the event of a budget cut, I drew connections to the ideological belief that America has entered a "color-blind" era thus these offices that specifically serve students of color and educate about systems of power and privilege are deemed unnecessary. Sociologist Eduardo Bonilla-Silva (2010) defines color-blindness as an ideology that "explains contemporary racial inequalities as the outcome of nonracial dynamics" he also goes on to assert that this ideology is kept in place through "practices that are subtle, institutional and apparently nonracial" (p. 2-3). Bonilla-Silva (2010) asserts that while race and racism are still very much rampant in American society, there is a pervasive belief, especially with the election of President Obama, the first Black president, that race and racism have become things of the past and Americans can now operate from a color-blind perspective.

I highlight Bonilla-Silva's argument regarding this new way of speaking about discrimination and race because I believe that these practitioners' statements regarding the potential cessation of their units may be a product of this new

understanding of race. For example, if the president and other key administrators believe that race is no longer an influential societal marker, then it may become easier to question the necessity of a Multicultural Affairs Offices. If racism is no longer a problem then why fund an office whose core mission is to educate about the effects of systems of power like racism? I believe that what these practitioners may be experiencing is an effect of what Bonilla-Silva (2010) identifies as color-blind ideologies and thus creates a barrier for these practitioners because it undermines the very need to have these offices on college campuses.

**Best Practices in conducting assessment.** While there were a number of barriers shared by the practitioners I interviewed, I wanted to ensure to also highlight practices that they identified as being fundamental to having a strong assessment approach. The first of which is having clear mission and vision statements as well as clear learning outcomes. Michelle and Renne spoke the most about these topics. During Michelle's interview she positioned the development of learning outcomes as the first step in conducting assessment; stating "one of my big goals is...to get back in the habit of writing decent learning outcomes because I feel like that has to happen before you can really talk about assessment and legitimate assessment". Further, Michelle identified that one of her major projects is helping others in her unit develop good learning outcomes for all of the initiatives in her unit. Michelle identifies "good" learning outcomes as those that are "measurable and can actual be assessed". Renne also spoke at length about the importance of having clear mission statements that can also guide assessment; stating "you can only assess something if you program mission is clear, if our goals are clear."

Additionally, both Renne and Michelle spoke about the need to create assessment tools that were concise and reflective of the mission statement/learning outcomes of the program being assessed. For Renne this realization was sparked when colleagues in the Central Assessment office at her institution challenged her to think about how she could “ask just one question, and the right one, and not one question with like five parts of but one question with one, you know, very short sentence”. Similarly, Michelle shared her philosophy on paper surveys stating “the surveys that we do...I’m very adamant should be no more than one page front and back and that included the demographic data”. What Michelle and Renne highlighted in their interviews was a need to conduct assessment that is easy for students to complete and that offer practitioners, as Michelle stated, a “snapshot” of the impact of their program.

**Creative approaches to assessment.** Another best practice that was highlighted by Renne, was stepping away from, or being willing to use a variety of assessment methods. While most of my interviewees shared that they survey students, Renne was actually challenged by a colleague in the Centralized Assessment Office at her institution to step back from surveys. Renne recounted that this person challenged Renne stating:

You already surveyed the students, you already know, you have your participation numbers, you already had a review last quarter of what the participants think about the program and where limitations are; why don’t you just get them together for a lunch and so okay now that I know that these are the challenges what is story with this program, what have you gravitated towards, what components of it? What have you learning from that? And, what is now the vision for the next iteration of [Program Name]. And, um it’s great, you know cause it’s better than a focus group, it’s better than a survey, its real time and your building community.

Further, Renne recalled other experiences where she stepped away from traditional modes of assessment and gathered information through other means. For example, at a previous institution where student employees ran programs and facilitated dialogues, in addition to asking those students to fill out program evaluations, she also asked that they write a reflective essay about their experience and themselves as facilitators of that experience. Additionally, she spoke about an assessment program she ran where she would collect student employees' resumes before they began their work with her unit and then collect the students' resumes when those students left their positions and compared what additional skills were listed as a result of their employment.

Finally, the assessment piece that Renne shared that she felt the most connection with was when she worked for a Multicultural Center that had three core pillars that guided the work of the center. When student employees were hired they were asked to define the core pillars and then throughout the year the students were taught a curriculum, at the end of the year students were again asked to define the three pillars. What Renne identified as being significant about this particular practice was the students took ownership of the assessment. One of her students turned the assessment data into a video about the Center. Renne sited this as one of her most powerful assessment experiences because it led to something that "was created by a student but inspired by assessment."

I offer these examples as a way of demonstrating how assessment can be conducted in Multicultural Affairs. Many of my participants expressed an appreciation for the focus of my study because it was something that they identified

as needing more space and attention within the field. Additionally, in my research in preparation for this study, I was surprised to find that there were no case studies of conducting assessment in Multicultural Affairs. These practices are not meant to be exhaustive of possible assessment methods, but instead may serve to spark other creative designs of assessment.

### **Considerations for Practice**

Based on the data gathered in during the course of this study I propose the considerations for conducting assessment in Multicultural Affairs. The following section will outline these considerations and their rationale.

First and foremost, practitioners should develop clear mission and vision statements for the unit in which the assessment is going to be collected. Practitioners interviewed during this study focused on the necessity for clarity because these statements will be what guide the unit as a whole. Further, all assessments done should work into a larger comprehensive assessment plan; multiple interviewees discussed how they were currently only conducting programmatic or individual assessment but were hoping to move into more comprehensive assessment planning in the future.

Additionally, the unit and all the programs within that unit should develop clear learning outcomes that can be measured by assessment. When conducting assessment, practitioners should focus on creating assessment tools that are clear, concise and quick. Further, practitioners should, when possible, approach assessment through a mixed methodology, collecting both narrative and numeric data. Moreover, practitioners should explore creating creative or non-traditional ways of assessment in

order to further engage students in the assessment process. Practitioners should continue to share the barriers they face and the best practices they create with each other.

Further, practitioners should be aware of the political nature of assessment. Previously in this chapter I proposed that a barrier to conducting assessment may be that practitioners are working within institutions that suggested to them that their work was inessential. The assertion of Shuh et al. (2001) that all assessment is political may be contextualized in this potential tension between the practitioners in Multicultural Affairs Offices and the wider institution. With this being said, it is imperative that practitioners within Multicultural Affairs Offices identify ways to conduct assessment that offer apt representations of the work they are doing with students.

Finally, all practitioners regardless of the support they receive from their institutions should continue, or begin, to evaluate the assessment tools they are utilizing and question if these tools are appropriate and reflective of their students' experiences. As Renne stated in her interview, Multicultural Affairs Offices are often places of counter-culture, spaces where dominant narratives are challenged. Within that kind of space, practitioners should reflect on how assessment tools that are created to capture dominant narratives may fail to aptly capture the stories of those utilizing a Multicultural Affairs Office. For some practitioners this may take the shape of utilizing mixed-methodologies in assessment to allow for both narrative and numeric data. A more radical step may be found in exploring ways of decolonizing methodologies as suggested by theorists like Linda Tuhiwai Smith and Chandra

Talpade Mohanty; whose work requires an interrogation of the very nature and assumptions of Western research, research methodologies and the theoretical frameworks found in both.

### **Limitations of Study**

There were several limitations of this study that which be explored in this section. The first limitation was the small sample size of this study. The study had a total enrollment of four; this small size increases the possibility that the findings of this study may not be generalizable. Secondly, the study design only incorporated one type of data collection, interviews. The depth and richness of the data collected could have been expanded upon if data was collected through multiple methods; including but not limited to focus groups, observations and collecting source materials from participants. Additionally, as the researcher, I only engaged in one round of interviews. Conducting multiple rounds of interviews would have allowed more in-depth questions to be asked which were based on initial data analysis. Finally, as the interviewer, I failed in utilizing the opportunities presented through a semi-structure interview format. Perhaps as a result of this being my first study, I found that it was difficult to form questions throughout the interviews, thus I missed the opportunity to delve deeper into the experiences that were shared during my interview process.

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

There needs to be a continuation of the exploration of how assessment is conducted in Multicultural Affairs. This study while contributing to the literature on this topic had many constrictions and there remain areas of further research. In



actuality, this study raised more questions than it answered. Areas of future research can include but should not be limited to:

**Narrowing of research question.** Throughout the course of this study, it became clear that the guiding research questions could in actually be broken into individual studies. Researchers in the future could narrow in on one aspect of this study and conduct an in-depth exploration of a specific component of this study. For example, studies in the future could focus on barriers in developing assessment, barriers practitioners face when implementing assessment and identifying how assessment is currently being collected by practitioners.

**Case studies of best practice.** It became apparent during the course of my study that these practitioners are in a developmental stage. For some, this may have been the first time their units were being asked to adopt this assessment focus. Future researchers could develop a case study of exemplars in the field and share how they conduct assessment, what barriers they faced in developing their assessment plans and how they combatted those barriers.

**Comparing the experiences of practitioners in Multicultural Affairs to other Student Affairs.** The focus of this study was narrowed to practitioners in Multicultural Affairs, future researchers could create a study that compared and contrasted the experiences of practitioners in Multicultural Affairs with those in other functional areas within Student Affairs. This type of study would help in identifying if the context of Multicultural Affairs presents practitioners with specific barriers not faced by their peers.

**Politics surrounding Multicultural Affairs and assessment.** During various interviews, it was shared that some practitioners believe that assessment data can protect their units from being the target of budget cuts. Future researchers could focus on this tension and explore how and why practitioners develop this perception. Researchers can also explore how this perception affects the assessment process.

### **Concluding Thoughts**

This study focused on exploring the types of barriers and best practices practitioners in Multicultural Affairs were experiencing as they developed and implemented assessment. The data for this study was collected through four semi-structured interviews. It was my hope that this study would fill a gap in current literature regarding the intersection of assessment and Multicultural Affairs. At the time this study was being conducted there was no widely published work that addressed the specifics of conducting assessment within the context of Multicultural Affairs. While the sample size of this study limits the generalizability of the findings, I do believe that the experiences shared by the participants can bring to give a context for specific barriers and best practices that are currently being faced by those tasked with completing assessment within Multicultural Affairs.

The role of assessment in higher education continues to be an evolving conversation; assessment is currently being used to evaluate programs, measure the effectiveness of initiatives, and help decide how funds should be allocated (Schuh & Upcraft, 2001). Considering the impact that assessment can have, and realizing that multiple participants viewed assessment as a way to ensure that their units were sustainable, I believe that research on this topic should continue and practitioners

should continue to share how the process of conducting assessment impacts their experience in the field of Student Affairs. By sharing these experiences, other practitioners may be able to adjust their approaches, identify potential barriers to aspect in the future, and allow for practitioners to share and identify common experiences. Engaging in this type of information gathering can help strengthen assessment practices in Multicultural Affairs and assist practitioners in tell the holistic story of the impact and effect of their work that they do. If assessment continues to play a large role in the profession of Student Affairs, then those in Multicultural Affairs need to continue to explore ways in which they can communicate the necessity, the impact and the learning that takes place within these offices.

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## Appendices

### Appendix A: Recruitment Letter

Hello,

My name is Jessica Martinez and I am currently a 2nd year College Student Services Administration graduate student at Oregon State University. I am completing a thesis titled A Critical Exploration of Assessment within Multicultural Student Services under the supervision of Allison Davis- White Eyes.

The focus of my thesis is on how professionals working within Multicultural Affairs offices or professionals offering services related to Multicultural Affairs develop and implement assessment. Multicultural Affairs offices are charged with providing services to under-represented students, advocating for the interest of those students while also raising awareness for the general campus community (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2009).

I am currently recruiting participants for my study and am looking for Student Affairs professionals who meet the following criteria:

- Work within the field of Multicultural Affairs with at least 2 years of experience
- Are aware of current assessment practices at their institution in relation to Multicultural Affairs
- Feel comfortable speaking about the development and/or the implementation of assessment practices within Multicultural Affairs

-Be of age, in their state of employment, to provide legal consent to for participation

Interviews will be recorded, will include a series of open-ended questions related to the previously stated topic, and are expect to last between 60-90 minutes. Names of interviewees and their institutions will be changed to provide confidentiality.

If you are interested in participating in this research study please contact Jessica Martinez at [martije2@onid.orst.edu](mailto:martije2@onid.orst.edu).

Appendix B: Additional Information Document

Version Date: 11/19/13 1

Additional Information

**Study Title:** A Critical Exploration of Assessment within Multicultural Student Services

**Student Researcher:** Jessica Martinez, Martije2@onid.orst.edu

**Principle Investigator:** Allison Davis-White Eyes Allison.Davis-Whiteeyes@oregonstate.edu

**Outline of Purpose:** Assessment in Student Affairs has become a tool to justify and support the work of departments, programs and events (Barham & Scott, 2006; Green, Jones, & Aloï, 2008). With the understanding that assessment is a valued and increasingly necessary within higher education, the focus of my research is to explore how assessment practices are developed and implemented by Multicultural Affairs offices or Student Affairs professionals offering services related to Multicultural Affairs. Researchers have indicated that while there has been a shift to conducting assessment, the process of how to create assessment tools has not been sufficiently outlined (Green et al., 2006, p.138). Multicultural Affairs offices are charged with providing services to under-represented students, advocating for the interest of those

students while also raising awareness for the general campus community (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2009). The purpose of this research study is to identify best practices and barriers that Multicultural Offices may have in developing and implementing assessment practices.

**Expectations of Participants:** Participants will be asked to take part in a recorded interview that will last approximately 60-90 minutes. During that interview it is expected that participants share based on their own experiences and express their views honestly. Participation in the study is voluntary. At any time during the interview participants can chose not to answer any questions by expressing to the interview that they would like to move on to the next question/topic or terminate the interview. After the interview participants will be given the opportunity to review a transcript of their interview and the conclusions drawn from the research team, this is not a requirement for participation and interviewees can opt out.

**Confidentiality:** The researcher team for this study cannot assure participants of anonymity, however there will be steps put in place in the interest of confidentiality. All data will be stored and locked within the office of the researcher. Further, all electronic data will be encoded and stored in a password protected file. During the transcription process all participants and their institutions will be assigned a pseudonyms.

**Risks and Benefits:** The researcher team has put procedures in place in the interest of confidentiality and we acknowledge that in the event of a breach of confidentiality participants' professional reputations may be effected, this the research time has identified the above stated protocols in the interest of confidentiality.

The benefits of this study may include prompting of critical thought about assessment, changes in an approach to assessment and/or an improvement in how professionals engage with assessment.

If you have any questions as to your rights as research participant you can contact the IRB at [IRB@oregonstate.edu](mailto:IRB@oregonstate.edu)

OSU IRB Study # 6017 Expiration Date: 11/20/2018

## Appendix C: IRB Protocol

**RESEARCH PROTOCOL**

11/13/2013

1. Protocol Title- A Critical Exploration of Assessment within Multicultural Student Services

**PERSONNEL**

2. Principal Investigator: Allison Davis-White Eyes
3. Student Researcher(s): Jessica Martinez
4. Co-investigator(s): N/A
5. Study Staff: N/A
6. Investigator Qualifications

Allison Davis-White Eyes holds a PhD. in Education and is the current director of Intercultural Student Services. Both of these roles provide Allison with an understanding of the field being studied and a familiarity with research methodology. As the PI, Allison will offer direct supervision of the research project ensuring that all human subject protections are addressed and the research materials are appropriately handled.

Jessica Martinez is a graduate student in the Education department. As the student researcher, Jessica will be charged with producing all research materials and processing the data collected. In preparation for this Jessica has taken a graduate level course in research methods. As part of this course Jessica completed ethics training and has an understanding of research methodology and procedures such as data collection, data analysis and participant selection.

7. Training and Oversight

It is not currently expected that the PI will be taking any extended absences. However, in the event that an extended leave occurs the PI will meet with the student researcher to review all remaining research needs. The PI and the student researcher will create a comprehensive plan that will be followed until the PI returns. In the event of employing a transcription service, it will only be through a professional service.

**FUNDING**

8. Sources of Support for this project (unfunded, pending, or awarded)  
This research project is unfunded.

**DESCRIPTION OF RESEARCH**

9. Description of Research

The focus of this research is to explore how assessment practices are developed and implemented by Student Affairs professionals within Multicultural Affairs offices or Student Affairs professionals offering services related to Multicultural Affairs. Multicultural Affairs offices are charged with providing services to under-represented students, advocating for the interest of those students while also raising awareness for the general campus community (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education [CAS], 2009). By conducting this research the student researcher hopes to identify best practices as well as barriers that Multicultural Offices may have in

developing and implementing assessment practices. The benefits of this study may include prompting of critical thought about assessment, changes in an approach to assessment and/or an improvement in how professionals engage with assessment. This research is being done for the completion of the student researchers thesis.

#### 10. Background Justification

Assessment in Student Affairs has become a tool to justify and support the work of departments, programs and events (Barham & Scott, 2006; Green, Jones, & Aloj, 2008). With the understanding that assessment is valued and increasingly necessary within higher education it becomes important to understand how assessment is being developed and conducted. Researchers have indicated that while there has been a shift towards conducting assessment, the process of how to create an assessment tool has not been sufficiently outlined (Green et al., 2006, p.138). It is the hope of the research team that this study will begin to fill a current gap in knowledge regarding assessment practices in Multicultural Affairs. This research has the potential to identify best practices as well as barriers that Multicultural Offices may have in developing and implementing assessment practices as well as prompting of critical thought about assessment, changes in an approach to assessment and/or an improvement in how professionals engage with assessment.

#### 11. Multi-center Study

This study is not a multi-center study.

#### 12. External Research or Recruitment Site(s)

##### a) Name or description of each research site:

Recruitment for this study will be conducted via professional listservs and informal professional networks (ie. Facebook Groups). The attached recruitment letter will be sent out via these networks that relate to the following interest areas (1) Student Affairs, (2) Multicultural Affairs, and/or (3) Assessment within Student Affairs. The attached recruitment letter will be distributed by both the PI and the student researcher. This recruitment letter will only be sent to listservs and groups that do not have a controlling moderator thus removing the need to gain letters of support. The recruitment letter will serve as a form of snowball sampling because the recruitment letter may be forwarded by those who receive the initial letter thus widening the potential pool of participants in the study.

##### b) Name and role of appropriate authority from each site providing a letter of support or permission (when applicable):

The listservs and groups to be utilized in this study do not have a controlling moderator, thus there is no authority figure through which the researcher team will need to gain permission from.

##### c) Name of each recruitment site:



The recruitment sites will be virtual Student Affairs networks.

- d) If recruitment method involves more than an advertisement (newspaper classified, flier, listserv email), name and role of appropriate authority from each site providing a letter of support:
- e) Attach or include ad copy or correspondence to be used for recruitment  
The recruitment correspondence is attached to this application.

### 13. Subject Population

Participants in this study will be Student Affairs professionals working within the field of Multicultural Affairs. Participant involvement is being limited to those with at least two years of experience within the field and who have knowledge of assessment practices at their current institution. These restrictions are being put in place to ensure that participants will be prepared to respond to the research topic in a manner that will develop the researcher's understanding of the topic. In order to gain a diverse understanding of the topic the total number of people that will participate in this research study is eight. The research study is not targeting any vulnerable populations. All participants will be consenting adults. The following criteria has been identified in order to increase the probability the participants will provide information rich data.

The criteria for involved is as follows

Have interested participants:

- Worked within the field of Multicultural Affairs with at least 2 years of experience
- Are they aware of current assessment practices at their institution in relation to Multicultural Affairs
- Do they feel comfortable speaking about the development and/or the implementation of assessment practices within Multicultural Affairs
- Are they of age, in their state of employment, to provide legal consent to for participation

The outline for recruitment is as follows. After IRB approval is gained the recruitment letter will be sent out via professional listservs and informal professional networks. When potential participants contact the student researcher the above criteria will be confirmed. Interested participants who fulfill the above criteria will be asked to provide multiple interview times. Interviews are expected to range from sixty to ninety minutes and will be recorded. If participants do not want to be recorded they will not be included in the study. The agreed upon time will be emailed to the participant in a confirmation email that includes the time, date, method of meeting (i.e physical location or via phone) and a document that offers an explanation of the research study as well as a message about voluntariness titled Additional Information.

### 14. Consent Process

Consent for this study will be gained verbally before the beginning of the interview. Participants will be provided with an Additional Information document before their scheduled interview time. This document will cover the purpose of the study, an outline of what will be expected of the participant with the inclusion of statement on voluntariness, the time commitment associated with this study, risks and benefits associated with involvement, confidentiality and contact information for both the student researcher and PI.

On the day of the interview the student researcher will ask if participants have reviewed the Additional Information document. If participants have not the student researcher will provide time for participants to review the document. Following that review, the student researcher will provide time for participants to ask questions regarding the study to ensure understanding regarding participation. Once participants have reviewed the Additional Information document the student researcher will confirm that participants consent to taking part of the study.

After reviewing the Additional Information document participants will be asked if:

- There are any questions I (the student researcher) can answer for you?
- Would you please tell me, in your own words the purpose of this study and your role as a participant?
- Are you aware of the fact that this interview will be recorded?
- Do you understand that you can terminate this interview at any time?
- With this understanding do you consent to being a participant in this study?

If participants express that they are uncomfortable with the study (i.e. the purpose, being recorded, or do not offer consent) the interview will be terminated. This study is utilizing verbal consent in the interest of confidentiality. A written consent document would be the only material linking participants with this study. Verbal consent minimizes the risk of breach of confidentiality.

#### 15. Assent Process

Not applicable.

#### 16. Eligibility Screening

The following criteria are being used to judge eligibility of participants. Participants will be asked that they still are interested in participating in the study after reviewing the following criteria.

Have interested participants:

- Worked within the field of Multicultural Affairs with at least 2 years of experience
- Are they aware of current assessment practices at their institution in relation to Multicultural Affairs
- Do they feel comfortable speaking about the development and/or the implementation of assessment practices within Multicultural Affairs

- Are they of age, in their state of employment, to provide legal consent to for participation

These criteria will be listed as required for participation on the recruitment email and will be confirmed before consent is obtained. This criteria will be reviewed when individuals contact the student researcher.

## 17. Methods and Procedures

**Methods.** In this study, the student researcher will use a qualitative research approach in order to best capture information rich data about the research question. The qualitative method is ideal for this study, because it will allow the researcher to understand how the phenomenon of assessment is affecting the work these professionals are engaging in. The student researcher will analyze the verbal data shared during interviews in order to discern how assessment is affecting the work of professionals within Multicultural Affairs offices, or Student Affairs professionals offering services related to Multicultural Affairs.

**Procedures.** In order to accomplish this research, the student researcher will conduct semi-structured interviews with multiple Student Affairs professionals. Conducting interviews will allow the student researcher to gain a deep understanding of the development and implementation of assessment within the field of Multicultural Affairs via primary experiences shared during the interview process.

**Data Collection.** The data for my study will be collected via semi-structured interviews. Formatting the interviews as semi-structured acknowledges that the “the individual respondents define the world in unique ways” (Merriam, 2009, p. 90). By working with semi-structure interview questions, the student researcher will frame the topic of inquiry but allow the participants to include data rich information that may have been missed if the student researcher used structured interview questions. The exploration of topics introduced by interviewees will allow the student researcher to best capture the diverse experiences of those being interviewed. The planned interview questions are as follows:

### Demographic Information:

- What geographical region is your institution in?
- How would you describe the institutional size of the college/university you work for?

### Content Questions:

- Could you describe how your office approaches assessment?
- What theories, philosophies and/or best practices influence how this particular Multicultural Affairs office approaches assessment?
- Does your office create its own assessment tools, if so what does that process look like?
- Considering the type programs offered by Multicultural Affairs, what assessment tools would best allow for a holistic representation of the quality of services being accessed by students?

- How is assessment data collected in this particular office?
- What considerations do you believe need to be taken into account when gathering assessment data from student populations that hold minority or oppressed identities?
- Is there anything you would like to add before concluding this interview?

Participant Selection. In order to gain the rich data, the student researcher will identify participants through purposeful sampling. Participants will be recruited via a recruitment letter sent out through professional listservs and informal professional networks. The student researcher will employ snowball sampling, in that, the recruitment letter may be forwarded who receive the initial letter to other potentially participants. This methodology has the potential to expand the scope of participation beyond the networks of just the PI and student researcher, thus adding to the diversity of responses. This method of recruitment will reduce researcher bias as the recruitment method has the potential to reach participants from various geographical locations, institutional types and Multicultural Affairs offices.

Data Analysis. The main form of data analysis that the student researcher will be conducting will be constant comparative analysis. The practice of constant comparative analysis allows the researcher to “generate and connect categories by comparing incidents in the data to other incidents, incidents to categories, and categories to other categories” (Creswell, 2008, p. 443). In order to engage in constant comparative analysis the student researcher will transcribe all audio recordings and then code all of the data collected, or relate key phrases to themes that reflect the data collected.

The data analysis of this study will also include member checking and transferability. Member checking will be accomplished by providing participants with the opportunity to review the transcript of their interview and conclusions drawn from that data. Participants will not be required to engage in this review and can opt-out. However, the student researcher believes that providing this opportunity will act as a way to ensure that the work produced aligns with the information given to by participants.

The student researcher will also seek ways to make the findings transferable. Transferability is a focus in this study because as Merriam states “what we learn in a particular situation we can transfer or generalize to similar situations subsequently encountered” (2009, p. 225) While the focus of this study is specific to the practices of Student Affairs professionals within Multicultural Affairs, illuminating how assessment is addressed may be transferred to other functional areas within students affairs and/or effect how assessment is broadly conceptualized in various fields of study.

#### 18. Compensation

This study will offer no form of compensation.

#### 19. Costs

There are no costs associated with this study.

#### 20. Drugs or Biologics

No drugs or biologics will be used in this study.

#### 21. Dietary Supplements or Food

No dietary supplements or food will be used in this study.

#### 22. Medical Devices

No medical devices will be used in this study.

#### 23. Radiation

No radiation will be used in this study.

#### 24. Biological Samples

No biological samples will be collected in this study.

#### 25. Anonymity or Confidentiality

The research team for this study cannot assure participants of anonymity, however there will be steps put in place in the interest of confidentiality. All data collected (audio recordings and handwritten) will be stored and locked within the office of the researcher. All electronic data will be encoded and stored in a password protected file for up to three years after the date of thesis completion and defense, post study termination. During transcription all participants and their institutions will be assigned pseudonyms, additionally, there will be no link between assigned pseudonyms and direct identifiers. The research team may be employing a professional transcription service. When participants enroll in this study they will be asked for verbal consent instead of a signing a waiver document, this form of documentation would be the only physical link between participants and the study.

#### 26. Risks

For participants involved in this study there is minimal risk. It is not the intention of the research team to engage in any research practices that are highly evasive or may negatively affect the participants. However, the research team does want to acknowledge the potential risk to professional reputation. Though not promoted, if negative views regarding the participants' institution are shared, these views may have implications for participant's professional reputations in the case of a breach of confidentiality.

To reduce the risk associated with this study the researcher team has put procedures in place in the interest of confidentiality. All data collected (audio recordings and handwritten) will be stored and locked within the office of the researcher. All electronic data will be encoded and stored in a password protected file for up to three years after the date of thesis completion and defense. All participants and their institutions will be assigned pseudonyms, additionally; there will be no link between assigned pseudonyms and direct identifiers. Access to materials will only be available to the student researcher and the PI. When participants enroll in this study they will be asked for verbal consent instead of signing a waiver document. In the event of a breach of confidentiality the research team will follow guidelines provided by the Institutional Review Board at Oregon State University.

#### 27. Benefits

Involvement in this study has the potential to strengthen current assessment practices in the field of Multicultural Affairs. Specific benefits include but are not limited to the prompting of critical thought about assessment, changes in an approach to

assessment and/or an improvement in how professionals engage with assessment. The research also has the potential to affect assessment practices across the division of Student Affairs and the conceptualization of assessment within educational practices broadly.

#### 28. Assessment of Risk:Benefit ratio

In assessing the risk: benefit ratio associated with this study, it is the belief of the research team that the benefits outweigh the risks. The knowledge shared in this study could improve assessment practices within the field Multicultural Affairs and may have an effect on how assessment is viewed broadly. The findings of this study could prompt critical thinking about assessment, change in an approach to assessment and an improvement in how professionals engage with assessment. With these benefits in mind the risk associated with this study is that the views shared by interviewees may be linked to individual participants. While the research team acknowledges that there is a potential risk to professional reputation in the event of a breach of confidentiality. However, we find the risks associated with this study to be minimal and when compared to the benefits it is the stance of the research team that the benefits outweigh the risks.