A Study of the Relationship between the Elements in Assessment Systems and Improvements in Candidate, Program, and Unit Performance at NCATE Accredited Higher Education Institutions in New York State

Anne Wahl
St. John Fisher College

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A Study of the Relationship between the Elements in Assessment Systems and Improvements in Candidate, Program, and Unit Performance at NCATE Accredited Higher Education Institutions in New York State

**Abstract**

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**Document Type**
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**Degree Name**
Doctor of Education (EdD)

**Department**
Executive Leadership

**First Supervisor**
Arthur L. Walton, Jr.

**Second Supervisor**
Raymond J. Giamartino

**Subject Categories**
Education

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By

Anne Wahl

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree Ed.D. in Executive Leadership

Supervised by
Dr. Arthur L. Walton, Jr.

Committee Member
Dr. Raymond J. Giamartino, Jr.

Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
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November 2008
We recommend that the dissertation by

Anne Wahl

Entitled: A Study of the Relationship between the Elements in Assessment Systems and Improvements in Candidate, Program, and Unit Performance at NCATE Accredited Higher Education Institutions in New York State

Be accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Education Doctorate degree.

Arthur L. Walton, Jr., Ph.D., Chair

Raymond J. Giamartino, Jr., Ed.D., Committee Member

1-31-08

Date
Dedication

The achievement of this goal was possible only with the faith, support, and encouragement of colleagues, friends, and most of all my family. My mentor and Dissertation Chair, Dr. Arthur L. Walton, challenged me to reach my potential and I am forever transformed because of his wisdom, leadership, and guidance. Thanks to Committee Member Dr. Ray Giamartino, for being a constant source of support and encouragement, and to Dr. Lynn Nichols for her assistance as a statistical consultant.

I would like to thank Dr. Julius Gregg Adams, Acting Dean, for providing much support and advice during the program and especially in the critical final months. Thanks to my colleagues, Carol Ziegler and Kristin Anderson, for encouraging and supporting me as a member of the first cohort of the program as they were pursuing degrees as well.

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Thanks to my sister, Betsy Christiansen, for providing editing and technical expertise as well as emotional support throughout the program. Thanks to my dad, Paul Guerrein, for filling in for me at sports events, shopping, cooking, cleaning, and generally taking care of all of us during the past few years. He taught me to work hard and kept encouraging me. This degree would not have been achievable without him.

Special thanks to my sons, Ben and Tim, for inspiring me to do my best work in the program as they are truly my best work in life. Extraordinary thanks to my husband, Larry Wahl, best friend and greatest supporter. He was amazing and able to keep the home fires burning while listening, editing, advising, and most of all believing in me. Without his support and encouragement, none of this would have been possible.
Biographical Sketch

Anne Wahl is currently the Director of Assessment, Certification, and Accreditation of the Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education at St. John Fisher College. Ms. Wahl attended Gannon University and graduated with a Bachelor of Arts degree in 1984. She attended the University of Rochester and graduated with a Master of Sciences degree in 1991. She began her doctoral studies in the summer of 2006 in the Ed.D. Program in Executive Leadership. Ms. Wahl pursued her research in assessment under the direction of Dr. Arthur L. Walton, Jr. and received the Ed.D. degree in 2008.
Abstract

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

There is a continued interest in the performance and accountability of higher education from students, government, accrediting agencies, and industry (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). There are also continued pressures on higher education to respond to the demands for improved documentation about their performance (Ewell, 2002). The accreditation process requires institutions to collect, report, and use information to improve the quality of their programs and services. In 2000, the New York State Education Department (NYSED) required all higher education institutions with teacher education programs to be accredited by a nationally approved body by 2006. Forty-five institutions in New York State selected NCATE as the nationally approved body for accreditation.

The problem that this study examined is whether the elements of the assessment systems in NCATE accredited units in New York State higher education institutions are perceived as important and lead to improvements in candidate, program and unit performance.

Theoretical Rationale

It is still uncommon to use a theoretical framework for work in assessment, but there is a growing recognition of applying models and frameworks to undertake assessment initiatives (Banta, 2002). Various evaluation models are used by colleges and universities. Gray (2002) indicates that to view assessment as scholarship, there must be a
model or theory of assessment that incorporates a variety of constructs from the field. He describes the purpose of program evaluation as providing information through measures based on objectives and scientific models.

The following models are rooted in the field of program evaluation and include the connoisseurship model, the goal-based approach, the hybrid approach, and the input model.

The connoisseurship model and the goal-based approach contain evaluation elements that are similar to those found in the NCATE accreditation process. For example, the connoisseurship model uses an outside evaluator who serves as the primary expert called the connoisseur (Black & Kline, 2002). The expert uses a combination of professional experience and case study approach to complete the evaluation. The NCATE evaluation model also uses a team of professionals who are asked to tell the story of an institution. The goal-based model approach includes multiple steps: clarifying goals, defining indicators, collecting data, and analyzing results. These steps can also used in the NCATE evaluation process.

Another model, the hybrid approach, is considered the best model currently available for conducting program reviews (Black and Kline, 2002) and also resembles the NCATE program evaluation approach. This mixed method approach uses objective data (quantitative) and participant perceptions (qualitative) to conduct a review. Black and Kline believe this combination provides a more powerful and comprehensive evaluation. The NCATE program review model is a combination of these models as it provides an expert team and a mixed-methods approach to evaluate the unit.
Banta (2002) surveyed institutions and asked if the assessment work was based on any theoretical models or conceptual framework. A few said they had arrived at the conclusion they were using Astin’s Input-Environment-Output (I-E-O) model. Alexander Astin’s model is designed as a method for assessing the impact of colleges on students and proposes a concept of institutional excellence as talent development. The I-E-O model suggests that educational assessment projects should include data on student inputs, student outcomes, and the educational environment. The model is a two-stage input-output method to explain the differences in student outcomes.

Patton’s (1997) work in utilization-focused program evaluation as a framework for outcomes assessment relates to Banta’s study on the characteristics of outcomes assessment in terms of developing faculty and staff for their work in assessment and building their capacity to conduct assessments. In Patton’s model, it is critical to involve stakeholders and prepare them to make decisions about all aspects of assessment: planning, measurement, implementation, evaluation, and sharing the results. The focus is on facilitating the engagement of stakeholders. Patton’s model is based on the concept of participatory evaluation, which is defined as making the findings more relevant and more meaningful through participation while building capacity for engaging in future evaluations and deepening capacity for evaluative thinking. However, Patton does not cite utilization-focused evaluation as a good fit with the accreditation model because the point of the evaluation is focused on users and not on external auditors (Patton, 1997). Patton indicates that accreditation processes are good examples of internal and external approaches to evaluation where an internal group collects the data and provides the findings for review by the external group.
Significance of the Study

The significance of this study is based on the national and state policy and program implications relating to assessment and accreditation in higher education. Accreditation has had a significant effect on the evolution of assessment (Banta, 2002). All accrediting organizations require some type and degree of assessment. All higher education institutions in New York State are required to be accredited, which involves developing and implementing unit assessment systems. NCATE accredited institutions must demonstrate that their assessment systems use data to improve processes, programs, instruction, student learning, and unit operations. According to NCATE requirements, if data are not used to change and improve the unit’s programs and practices, the system is not considered fully implemented (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

The study is also timely, as assessment scholars see a paradigm shift in assessment and accreditation (Driscoll & Cordero de Noriega, 2006). Assessment and accreditation were once seen as disconnected from the work of faculty and student learning and only an administrative task, but are now becoming part of the mainstream of higher education. Accountability and program improvement are also part of the paradigm shift in assessment and accreditation in higher education. Regardless of whether the accreditation is conducted at the program, unit, or campus level, institutions are expected to show evidence of effectiveness at all levels (Lubinescu, Ratcliff, and Gaffney, 2001). In this regard, the study has the potential to inform future policy and program directions and decisions in assessment at NCATE, other accrediting bodies, and higher education institutions across the State and country.
From a professional practice standpoint, assessment is the number one reason higher education institutions fail accreditation. This study adds to the body of knowledge in assessment and provided valuable information on best practices in assessment designed to improve candidate, program, and unit performance in higher education institutions. This study yields results that may help institutions as they pursue accreditation and attempt to evaluate and improve a unit and its programs.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between the perceived importance of the elements in the assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. This study examined how the elements of the assessment system affect the use of assessment results to make subsequent improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. To accomplish this purpose, data was gathered from NCATE accredited, four year, higher education institutions in New York State. The data was analyzed to determine the perceptions of accredited institutions relating to the importance ascribed to the required assessment system elements. These data were examined in the context of improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance as reported by higher education institutions participating in the study.

Research Questions

The following primary research questions were examined:

1. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain structural elements of the assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance?
2. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain operational elements of the assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance?

3. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain implementation elements of the assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance?

4. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain assessment elements of the assessment system and the areas identified for further development and improvement?

5. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the assessment system and the indicators for improvement?

The following secondary research questions were examined:

1. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the NCATE assessment systems and certain demographic variables?

2. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the NCATE assessment systems, certain demographic variables, and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance?

3. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the NCATE assessment systems and certain institutional characteristics?

4. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the NCATE assessment systems, certain institutional characteristics, and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance?
5. Is there a relationship between certain demographic variables, institutional characteristics and the areas identified for further development and improvement?

Definitions of Terms

The following operational terms and definitions were derived from the research literature and used to provide a context for the major concepts explored in this study.

Accreditation: a process for assessing and enhancing academic and educational quality through voluntary peer review. NCATE accreditation informs the public that an institution has a professional education unit that meets state, professional, and institutional standards of educational quality (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006). Accreditation is also the decision rendered by NCATE when an institution’s professional education unit meets NCATE’s standards and requirements.

Assessment: An analytical process of systematically evaluating information on candidate performance, program, and faculty quality, and unit operations against established standards to provide information to reform programs and practice (Womack, 2000).

Assessment and Unit Evaluation System: The unit, with the involvement of its professional community, is regularly evaluating the capacity and effectiveness of its assessment system, which reflects the conceptual framework and incorporates candidate proficiencies outlined in professional and state standards. The unit regularly examines the validity and utility of the data produced through assessments and makes modifications to keep abreast of changes in assessment technology and in professional standards. Decisions about candidate performance are based on multiple assessments made at multiple points before program completion and in practice after completion of programs.
Data show a strong relationship of performance assessments to candidate success throughout their programs and later in classrooms or schools. The unit conducts thorough studies to establish fairness, accuracy, and consistency of its assessment procedures and unit operations. It also makes changes in its practices consistent with the results of these studies. (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

*Assessment Standard 2 Unit Evaluation and Assessment System:* The unit has an assessment system that collects and analyzes data on applicant qualifications, candidate and graduate performance, and unit operations to evaluate and improve the performance of candidates, the unit, and its programs (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

*Assessment Standard Elements:* The major expectations and requirements contained in each NCATE standard (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

*Candidate:* Individuals admitted to, or enrolled in, programs for the initial or advanced preparation of teachers, teachers continuing their professional development, or other professional school personnel (Professional Standards, 2006).

*Candidate Performance:* Measures of candidate proficiencies, in areas of teaching and effects on student learning, candidate knowledge, and dispositions. Candidate performance data may be derived from a wide variety of sources, such as projects, essays, or tests demonstrating subject content mastery; employer evaluations; state licensure tests; portfolios; independent projects; reflection papers; clinical observations; and other evidence of pedagogical and professional teaching proficiencies (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

*Conceptual Framework:* Is an underlying structure in a professional education unit that gives conceptual meaning to the unit's operations through an articulated rationale and provides direction for programs, courses, teaching, candidate performance,
faculty scholarship and service, and unit accountability (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

*Four Year Independent Institutions:* Chartered (incorporated) by the New York State Board of Regents or by acts of the State Legislature with their own boards of trustees. All are operated on a not-for-profit basis (NYSED website).

*Four Year Public Institutions:* An institution with a central governing board and administration. Generally, each board has the same powers and responsibilities as the governing boards of the independent colleges (NYSED website).

*Implementation Elements:* The processes employed to put the assessment system into effect or action.

*Indicator:* An instrument or gauge that measures something and registers the measurement. Indicators, for purposes of this study, are defined as instruments that measure candidate, program, and unit performance (e.g., grade point average, student teaching evaluation, research, etc.) (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

*NCATE:* The National Council for Accreditation of Teacher Education, is the professional accrediting organization for schools, colleges, and departments of education in the United States. It is a coalition of member organizations of teachers, teacher educators, content specialists, and local and state policy makers.

*NYSED:* The New York State Education Department. The Board of Regents and the State Education Department govern education from pre-kindergarten to graduate school. It is constitutionally responsible for setting education policy, standards, and rules and are legally required to ensure that the entities carry them out (NYSED website).
Operational Elements: The methods employed to support the assessment system’s operations and functions.

Perceived Importance: The level or degree of importance ascribed to each item on the survey by the respondents.

Performance Data: The qualities and levels of proficiency of candidates in the application of their knowledge to classroom teaching and other professional situations. The phrase is also used to connote the qualities and levels of institutional practice such as making collaborative arrangements with clinical schools, setting faculty professional development policies, or providing leadership through technical assistance to community schools (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

Professional Education Unit: The college, school, department, or other administrative body with the responsibility for managing or coordinating all programs offered for the initial and advanced preparation of teachers and other school professionals. The professional education unit (unit) is comprised of all programs offered by the institution for the purpose of preparing teachers and other school professionals to work in pre-kindergarten through twelfth-grade settings (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

Program of Study: A planned sequence of courses and experiences required by higher education institutions for preparing teachers and other professional school personnel to work in preschools through twelfth-grade (P-12) schools (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

Structural Elements: The methods and approaches employed in designing the assessment system.
Students: Children and youth attending P-12 schools as distinguished from teacher candidates (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

Unit Head: A dean, director, chair, or other individual employed by the higher education institution and designated as the leader of the professional education unit. This person is assigned authority and responsibility for the overall administration and operation of the unit (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006).

Summary of Remaining Chapters

The following is a brief summary of the remaining four chapters in the research study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the current literature related to assessment. It begins with the historical context of assessment and identifies and analyzes the related topics. Chapter 3 is a summary of the methodological approaches used to answer the research questions. This chapter provides a discussion of the instrument used, research participants, and the data analysis procedures used. Chapter 4 presents the results of the data analysis. The key findings, conclusions, and recommendations are presented in Chapter 5.
Chapter 2: Review of the Literature

Introduction and Purpose

This chapter provides a current review of the literature examining assessment models, programs, systems, and practices. It also provides a historical context of the research and discussion of contemporary issues on assessment and accreditation. The literature on assessment was examined in the context of accountability versus improvement, required NCATE assessment system standards and related elements, the use of data to inform decisions and support improvements, leadership, assessment system support, obstacles to implementation, and the scholarship of assessment.

The literature on assessment in higher education is extensive and primarily related to institutional effectiveness and student outcomes assessment. Very little of the literature reviewed was specific to professional education units or Schools of Education. Although much has been written in the past two decades on the increased accountability demanded by federal and state agencies, less has been written on how institutions are developing and implementing campus-wide assessment systems to foster accountability and candidate and student success. In addition, there is little research on the extent that assessment systems in higher education institutions have been designed and implemented in response to external demands, or used to gather candidate assessment information for academic decisions and educational and institutional improvements (Peterson, Einarson, Trice, & Nichols, 1997).
The nature of accreditation as a voluntary process for higher education institutions has changed over the years. There has been a transition from an initially voluntary choice to one that is increasingly mandatory (Ratcliff, Lubinescu, & Gaffney 2001). Pressure has come from several directions, including state and federal agencies which are requiring campuses to provide evidence of student learning and learning outcomes, and assess if students have met the prescribed standards. Many higher education institutions, both private and public, have responded to this pressure (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Institutions of higher education throughout the United States are struggling to successfully complete the assessment process for external and internal purposes. In a National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI) study, 95% of institutions reported using two or more types of assessment (Peterson & Vaughan, 2002).

In the fall of 1988, federally approved accreditation organizations were required by the U.S. Department of Education to include, in their criteria for accreditation, evidence of institutional outcomes (Palomba & Banta, 1999). Many accreditation agencies recognized the importance of assessment and mandated that institutions document how the results of the assessment process are used for institutional improvement (Woldt, 2004). The New York State Education Department (NYSED, 2000) required all Schools of Education in higher education institutions be nationally accredited by 2006.

Topic Analysis

Historical Context. Assessment in higher education has a long history dating back to 1910 with college and university reputation ranking studies (Miller, 2007). During this period, institutions of higher education were ranked on enrollment and graduation rates.
During the 1930s and 1940s, the study of collegiate learning took place as well as studies of retention, student behavior, and mastery learning (Ewell, 2002). Through the 1960s and 1970s, retention and student behavior data and literature emerged. This decade also saw the rise of program evaluation as an action research tradition. At this time, program evaluation relied generally on quantitative methods. In the 1980s, higher education adopted the term “assessment” to differentiate program evaluations from program improvement processes (Banta, 2002). The assessment movement in higher education became prominent around the time of the first national conference on assessment in higher education in 1985 in South Carolina (Ewell, 2002). Astin considers performance funding a major catalyst for the assessment movement. Performance funding was developed for public higher education institutions in the state of Tennessee. In performance funding, institutions are awarded or denied state funding based on student performance on standardized tests. Astin (1993) suggests this event alerted legislators and public officials in other states to the possibility of using student assessment as a tool for achieving a greater degree of accountability in public higher education. Astin also suggests that performance funding may have motivated higher education institutions to take a more critical look at their own assessment practices.

Ewell (2002) explains that the early pioneer institutions such as Northeast, Missouri, and Alverno were developing the use of sophisticated student assessment programs. During this period, a number of “assessment experts” appeared on the higher education scene and were in great demand by states and institutions to improve and strengthen their assessment procedures. A conventional knowledge about assessment began to emerge as grants were awarded and educational associations supported
assessment activities and programs. Ratcliff, Lubinescu, and Gaffney (2001) claim the accountability movement in the 1990s followed the campus-based assessment movement of the 1980s. This sequence of events produced the connection between accreditation and student outcomes assessment and led to the merger of the accreditation and student outcomes assessment movements.

**Accountability versus Improvement.** Various researchers have suggested there is an accountability versus improvement division or debate within the field of assessment (Ewell 2002; Banta 2002; Aper, Cuver, & Hinkle, 1990). Ewell discusses the conflicting political and intellectual traditions associated with the birth of the assessment movement, which he states are still a part of the field of assessment. The discussion of accountability versus improvement began in the early stages of the assessment movement. For example, Ewell notes that participants attending the first assessment conference in South Carolina in 1985 were divided along the lines of accountability and improvement when it came to discussing the purposes of assessment. One group was seeking reasonable and convincing ways to gather information to improve curriculum and pedagogy. The other group was seeking ways to address new federal and state assessment mandates.

Banta (2002) indicates that certain education professionals view assessment as a series of activities required for compliance because of an external mandate while others view assessment as a powerful tool in the service of continuous improvement in higher education. Ewell (2006) defines this “dilemma of purpose” as the difference between making a decisive judgment about a program and engaging in continuous improvement. He recommends recognizing that both judgment and continuous feedback are important and may not happen in the same process. Ewell suggests the accrediting bodies are
moving in the direction of integrating compliance and engagement to move to the next level of improvement.

Accreditation. Dodd (2004) describes accreditation as a fact of life in higher education and the most prominent of all accountability efforts. Many campuses are often externally motivated to conduct assessments as a result of policies and regulations mandated by national and state education agencies. For example, NYSED approved new regulations in 2000 requiring all higher education institutions in New York State offering teacher education programs to be accredited by an approved accrediting body by 2006. Accrediting bodies such as NCATE, the Teacher Education Accreditation Council (TEAC), and Regents Accreditation of Teacher Education (RATE) are examples of major accrediting bodies that are approved by the U.S. Department of Education and NYSED to conduct accreditation reviews at higher education institutions in New York State.

In the context of state and national policies and regulations, many institutions view assessment as necessary to meet accreditation requirements rather than as an opportunity to make internal improvements. Smith, who conducted research on faculty engagement and assessment in higher education asserts, “The model of assessment as a mandate, which relies on fear rather than empowerment, will fail to foster true faculty engagement in assessment” (Smith, 2005, p. 9). Faculty who served on self-study teams and administrators who managed accreditation processes did not reflect on or fully understand what accreditation is, what ends it serves, or the connection to assessment (Ratcliff, Lubinescu, & Gaffney 2001).

Wright (2002) describes the intersection of assessment and accreditation in the last 15 years as powerful. She indicates there are positive consequences of accreditation
which significantly affect the evolution of assessment and also acknowledges the tensions between the two movements. Wright argues assessment has strengthened accreditation and accreditation has strengthened assessment. She further explains that accreditation has never been more “intellectually vital, service-oriented, and useful” to institutions of higher education than it is today. The single most influential contributor to the vitality of assessment is accreditation. Accreditation has supported the development of resources and motivating institutions to implement assessment systems (Wright). She attributes this influence to the staying power of accreditation, which continues to come back on a systematic cycle.

One of the obstacles that Wright (2002) identifies is directly linked to accreditation in the role of external auditor. Although accreditation can drive assessment, it can also hinder the development of assessment. To address this obstacle, units must be able to feel comfortable identifying and disclosing weaknesses and making improvements without worrying about repercussions.

Driscoll (2006) concurs with Wright (2002) and indicates that changes occurred when accrediting bodies became involved with assessment. She sees assessment and accreditation on parallel tracks and also asserts that the assessment movement pushed the accreditation movement. Driscoll cites the standards and language of accrediting agencies as proof of a paradigm shift to accreditation as a learner-centered process. She further cites the standards and policies of accrediting bodies as indicators of modeling and teaching about best practices in assessment. Various researchers predicted that accreditation associations would be expecting comprehensive and complete assessment plans from higher education institutions with full implementation within five years.
Current accreditation thinking is moving beyond collecting data to the use of data (Driscoll, 2006).

**NCATE Standards and Required Elements.** NCATE uses six standards and a set of related elements in the conduct of its accreditation reviews. Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation describes NCATE’s expectations for performance assessment systems. This standard was introduced in fall 2001 when NCATE introduced a performance-based assessment model as part of its new accreditation system. Standard 2 requires higher education institutions to create and sustain an assessment system that tracks candidate learning and collects data on candidates, programs, and unit performance. The findings from the data are used to inform and improve the programs and unit operations. Standard 2 is divided into three elements: the Assessment System, Data Collection and Analysis, and the Use of Data for Improvement (Mitchell, Allen, & Ehrenberg, 2006).

**Assessment Standard Elements.** Assessment standard elements are the major expectations and requirements contained in each NCATE standard (NCATE Professional Standards, 2006). NCATE’s Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation is comprised of three elements and the first is the Assessment System. This element is established by the structural design of the system including the following requirements: alignment with the conceptual framework and standards, assessment measures, instruments, use of multiple measures for multiple purposes, and elimination of bias (Mitchell et al. 2006).

The second element of an assessment system is Data Collection, Analysis, and Evaluation and is the operational function of the assessment system. This second element
in Standard 2 focuses on the maintenance of the system and suggests the assessment system should operate on a schedule. The schedule indicates when data are collected and how they are summarized and analyzed. In addition, the operational element identifies who is responsible for data collection and analysis and how these function. The operational element also requires the use of information technology to maintain the system.

The third element is Use of Data for Improvement which is established by the implementation of the assessment system or the use of the data. This element requires a regular, systematic use of data as well as sharing data with faculty and candidates, and the use of data for candidate, program, and unit improvement (Mitchell, et al. 2006).

Assessment System. Assessment is more than the collection of data (Palomba and Banta, 1999) and, in order for an assessment system to work, it must be purposeful about the information that is collected. After the data is collected, it must be examined and used to make improvements or changes.

Banta (2002) describes three phases of a successful assessment system: planning, implementation, and improving and sustaining. In the planning phase, all stakeholders are involved, including faculty members and administrators. The implementation phase includes a clear plan and purpose, objectives, as well as a commitment to improvement. The improving and sustaining phase includes the ongoing use of assessment to improve programs and services. This stage includes incorporating evaluation and improvement of the assessment process itself. See Appendix A, which depicts the alignment between Banta’s three phases of assessment and NCATE’s three elements of the assessment system.
Linking accreditation and assessment is a best practice supported in much of the literature. McEady (2006) indicates that the new accreditation models foster integration of new assessment models.

*Data Collection, Analysis, and Evaluation.* The second element in Standard 2 is Data Collection, Analysis, and Evaluation. The purpose of this element is the maintenance of the system. This element provides a focus for the collection, summary, and analysis of data through a systematic and comprehensive process. The goal is for the assessment system to function on a schedule determined by the unit (Mitchell, et al. 2006). This standard and element requires institutions to use technology in the maintenance of the assessment system. Mitchell, et al. (2006) indicates that institutions are using a variety of software packages for this purpose, ranging from Microsoft Excel to specialized commercial packages such as Jenzaber and Live Text.

*Use of Data.* The phrase “closing the loop” appears frequently in the research when discussing the use of data. Driscoll (2006) defines it as a process to use data to determine implications for change. She indicates the closing process should be ongoing and continue after the accreditation visit.

Many campuses in higher education are involved with some type of assessment, but one problem is that few institutions use assessment data in decision making (Woldt, 2004). An essential assessment process is to use the findings to inform institutional decision-making, which is one of the most difficult and least understood phases of the assessment process. Although difficult, the “closing the loop” process is necessary to improve practice (Woldt, 2004).
Woldt's (2004) study related to assessment was conducted to identify in which areas of institutional decision-making the data were being used the most or least. She also studied how extensively five variables influenced the use of the results. Chief academic officers of community colleges were the population for the research study. Three-hundred and two chief academic officers were surveyed and 216 (72%) responded.

The findings revealed all five variables significantly impact the use of assessment results in institutional decision-making. Over 40% of respondents reported upper administrators understood the assessment process at least somewhat, but were new to the development and implementation of assessment plans. Analysis of the data revealed that results are most used in: (a) curriculum planning/evaluation, (b) improvement of teaching and learning, (c) program evaluation, and (d) reports to accrediting agencies and upper-level administration (Woldt, 2004).

The assessment process culminates when assessment results are used to improve future learning (Huba & Freed, 2000). Faculty and staff contribute their knowledge, expertise, and perspectives, thereby enhancing the overall assessment system. As a result, assessment works best when it is viewed as a group effort. Faculty and administrative leadership should be involved and engaged in assessment in order for a higher education institution to sustain an assessment system and use data to make improvements in practice and programs (Banta, Lund, Black, & Oblander, 1996).

Leadership - Unit Heads. A dean, director or chair is designated as the head of the unit and is assigned authority and responsibility for overall administration and operation (Professional Standards, 2006). Banta (2002) indicates that many administrators have no formal training in assessment or evaluation. Few have experience in applying these
methods to evaluate and improve programs. Banta also asserts that, in general, faculties: have not welcomed the assessment movement on their campuses, debate the value of assessment, and resent the added responsibilities associated with implementing effective assessment. Woldt (2004) appears to agree with certain aspects of Banta’s findings, indicating that administrators have varying degrees of understanding and experience with an assessment process or system. Many administrators are first introduced to assessment when their institution is preparing a self-study for an external accrediting agency. Woldt asserts that effective leadership is critical in planning, implementing, improving and sustaining a successful assessment system. She cites a 1996 study by McClure that found the more college leaders were personally involved in assessment activities, the more likely they were to use assessment results for making internal improvements and to believe that assessment would lead to ongoing improvements.

Astin (1993) appears to agree and also cites four assessment issues leadership must consider: (a) new assessment initiatives should be based on a clear and explicitly stated understanding of what the mission is, and should be designed to further that mission; (b) existing assessment practices should be analyzed in terms of the same mission, and practices that do not appear to be enhancing that mission should be revised or eliminated; (c) faculty, administrators, and others who conduct assessment activities need to understand why they assess and how the results can be used to enhance educational policy and practice; and (d) persons who will be responsible for designing and operating an assessment program should ideally possess a unique combination of skills and competencies not usually found in graduates of traditional doctoral programs in education, psychology, or the social sciences.
Peterson and Vaughn (2002) conducted an extensive study on how institutions promote and support the use of student assessment for educational improvement through a three-phase project supported by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI). The first phase was an extensive literature review, the second phase involved a national survey that inventoried and analyzed institutional patterns of all two and four-year colleges and universities, and the third phase included conducting case studies. Based on the literature review, seven distinct areas emerged relative to administrative support for student assessment. These seven areas provided the structure for a national survey instrument that was implemented in 1998. Of the seven areas, two specifically address the faculty and administrative leadership influence on assessment: institution-wide support for student assessment and assessment management policies and practices. The national survey instrument was designed based on the literature review and the primary purpose was a comprehensive inventory of each institution’s organizational and administrative patterns. The survey response rate was 1393 (55%). Descriptive patterns were analyzed by type of institution and regression analyses were applied to relationships among variables.

An institution’s purposes for engaging in assessment is largely external (preparing for accreditation) was rated the highest (69%) and followed by improving student achievement (59%) and improving academic programs (55%). Most campuses reported institution-wide administrative and governance activities. The most frequently reported were faculty governance committees on assessment (58%) and workshops for administrators (56%). The least used activities are incentives for academic units (6%) and the participation of administrators in student assessment (27%). Administrators were seen
as the most supportive group on campuses (72%) and faculty were not seen as supportive
(27%) although individual faculty often played key roles in assessment initiatives.

Faculty Engagement. A study by Welsh and Metcalf (2003) examined faculty
perspectives on accreditation-driven institutional effectiveness activities in higher
education. The study measured the impact of four variables on faculty perceptions about
the importance of institutional effectiveness activities. The four variables that were
examined included: institutional motivation, level of involvement, definition of quality,
and depth of implementation. The findings suggested three variables that served as
significant predictors of administrative perceptions of the importance of institutional
effectiveness activities: perceived motivation, personal level of involvement and
definition of quality. However, depth of implementation did not serve as a significant
predictor of faculty support for institutional effectiveness activities. The findings further
suggest that faculty involvement and support are critical to successful implementation,
which supports the findings that appear in Womack’s study (2000). The survey was a
mailed questionnaire distributed to faculty who served on self-study steering committees
at the 168 institutions that were reviewed for either initial accreditation or reaffirmation
of accreditation. The population consisted of 704 faculty and a 386 (55%) responded to
the survey.

Administrators must cultivate faculty interest and support. This Welsh and
Metcalf study (2003) also supports the contention that appears in Palomba and Banta
(1999) on the fostering of institutional support for assessment. One limitation noted in the
study was that faculty members who responded were all from accredited institutions and
not necessarily representative of the general faculty population.
Smith (2005) presents recommendations to faculty and administrators to help guide and implement assessment initiatives at higher education institutions. He views the “delicate process of empowering faculty to engage in meaningful assessment in a new way” (Smith, 2005, p. 7). Smith proposes four common areas to help faculty focus and find ownership of assessment: (a) assessment in higher education should be viewed as professional development, (b) the leadership necessary for effective assessment must come from within the departmental ranks as opposed to an administrative mandate, (c) faculty should collaborate with administrators responsible for assessment initiatives, and (d) the process must include an effective feedback loop that fully integrates assessment activities into the functioning of the department or program. He further discusses leadership at the higher levels of administration and proposes it is most effective when it supports assessment efforts conducted at program and classroom levels. The leadership must actively encourage faculty members and build relationships in various ways such as attending faculty meetings. The goal is to help faculty see the benefits of the process in improving the quality of the program for both students and faculty.

Faculty’s conceptual understanding of assessment must change to one of assuming active and shared responsibility for student achievement (Ewell, 2002). Banta (2002) also discusses the fundamental changes that are needed to “transform assessment from a movement to a culture.” She urges institutions to enhance the capacity of the faculty and staff to contribute to the assessment system and suggests a major portion of faculty must engage in assessment to make significant progress in the scholarship of assessment. Banta defines the scholarship of assessment as the systematic work of carrying out assessment, determining what methods work best over time and adjusting
practice as needed, then, reassessing to see if the goals were achieved and sharing the findings with colleagues.

A supportive environment characterized by effective administrative leadership is critical to effective assessment. Professional development activities are also important for faculty and administrative leadership to help promote new ideas about the uses of assessment data and build the capacity of the institution (Banta, et al., 1996). Numerous writers and studies have suggested that active faculty and administrative leadership and involvement in assessment activities are key components in developing and implementing an effective assessment system (Ewell, 2002; Banta, 2002; Womack, 2000; Maki, 2000; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003; and Smith, 2005).

Obstacles. Woldt (2002) studied the obstacles in outcomes assessment and made recommendations for overcoming those obstacles. She focused on the specific obstacles that prevent program administration from successfully completing the outcomes assessment process. The survey was sent to 135 dental hygiene education program directors across the nation and 107 (79%) responded. The respondents completed a 65-item questionnaire developed for the study. The data revealed five obstacles, and one of these, inadequate communication, leadership, and guidance about assessment matters, specifically relates to leadership. Another obstacle, institutional personnel's varying levels of understanding of outcomes assessment as a process and philosophy, also relates to faculty and administrative leadership. This evidence supports Banta's (2002) research on effective characteristics of outcomes assessment. Woldt's recommendations for overcoming these obstacles included: treating assessment as an ongoing process, ensuring
clear and effective communication, and addressing the varying levels of understanding with differentiated professional development.

Maki (2002) suggests that externally mandated assessment typically ebbs and flows within an institution in relation to the timing of accreditation visits. Originating from an external force, usually accreditation, assessment is considered a burden to or an additional responsibility for faculty thus creating resistance and resulting in a forced and brief commitment. She asks what if the commitment to assessment was to come from faculty members themselves rooted in intellectual curiosity about how students learn. She discusses faculty members’ motives for teaching stemming from their goal to develop critical thinkers and effective problem-solvers.

Maki appears to agree with Banta and views extending intellectual curiosity into inquiry about student learning as a part of the scholarship of teaching and learning that contributes to research and rethinking current approaches to assessment. Institutional leaders need to frame a commitment to assessment as a professional responsibility that is integral to teaching and contributes to higher education’s knowledge about student learning. Creating a culture or environment that promotes inquiry into student learning means redesigning or creating new structures and processes to allow significant time for faculty and administrative leadership to conduct research, interpret results of assessment, and reflect on these interpretations to advance innovations in programs and practice. Maki asserts institutions that claim assessment as their own will likely transform themselves to sustain a focus on student learning. The faculty will be supported by institutional structures and processes that integrate assessment into the cycles of institutional life. Higher education institutions need to create an unbiased campus
environment to receive the data and foster open inquiry about assessment results, institutional and programmatic self-reflection about those results, and development of innovations in teaching and curriculum. These institutions will need to be clear about the value of engaging in assessment as research that advances pedagogy. The goal is for faculty to generate significant questions and inquiry about student learning, about the design of methods to assess learning over time, and about interpreting and using assessment results to inform pedagogy and curricular design. She states developing an institutional commitment to assessment requires that higher education establish principles of inquiry growing from and sustained by faculty intellectual curiosity. (Maki, 2002).

Scholarship of Assessment. Assessment and accreditation have merged over the past 15 years and one of the consequences of the merger is accreditation’s significant impact on the evolution of assessment and the emergence of a scholarship of assessment. The scholarship of assessment movement in higher education has roots in the early 1970s. During the late 1990s, the phrase “scholarship of assessment” was being used by many authors conducting research in the area of assessment. As a result of its growing popularity, a session was proposed for and conducted at the June 2000 American Association for Higher Education Assessment Conference titled “The Scholarship of Assessment” (Banta, 2002). Banta defined the scholarship of assessment as systematic work that involves carrying out assessment, determining what methods work best over time, adjusting practice according to new information, reassessing strategies and actions to see if the desired ends were achieved, and sharing the findings with colleagues. In the last seven years, scholarship of assessment has become a more commonly used phrase,
and an important area for conducting research and informing practice among outcomes assessment scholars and practitioners.

Astin (1993) also uses the term scholarly assessment, which he defined as the work that is aimed at improving the day-to-day conduct of assessment. It involves selecting or creating assessment methods, trying them out, reflecting with colleagues on their strengths and weaknesses, then modifying the methods or trying new ones in the spirit of improving the effectiveness and impact of assessment continuously. This scholarship of assessment is systematic inquiry designed to deepen and extend the foundation of knowledge underlying assessment. It involves basing studies on relevant theory and practice, gathering evidence, developing a summary of findings, and sharing those findings with the growing community of assessment scholars and practitioners. Good assessment is really good research, and the ultimate goal of such research should be to help institutions of higher education make better choices and better decisions in running educational programs and institutions. Assessment results are of most value when they shed light on the causal connections between educational practice and educational outcomes.

Banta (2002) acknowledges there are difficulties in conducting scholarly work on assessment in higher education and obstacles related to faculty engagement in assessment. Those responsible for leading assessment initiatives must have a working knowledge and practice in the “intellectual domains” of outcomes assessment: psychometrics, cognitive development, and program evaluation. On many campuses assessment work is not specifically recognized or rewarded and there are few members interested in carrying out the scholarship of assessment.
Banta (2002) conducted a study on characteristics of effective outcomes assessment through a survey sent to 145 institutions. She then selected 14 institutions that were distinctive in terms of their overall approaches to assessing institutional effectiveness. The instrument was a questionnaire asking the sample population to describe the scholarship of assessment that was evident on their campus. Nine of the fourteen questionnaires were completed and returned. Of the 9 higher education institutions that responded, 7 were public and 2 were private with enrollments from 2600 to 40600. “Knowledgeable, effective leadership” was one of the 17 characteristics of effective outcomes assessment that was identified in the study. The research suggests that a supportive chief executive and provost can strengthen assessment and that the support of top leadership is essential in establishing and sustaining assessment.

Banta’s research suggests that knowledgeable individuals at other levels are even more critical to the core of the work. Also, leadership within each academic area must be cultivated to improve the assessment process. Another characteristic identified in the findings is faculty and staff development, which builds the capacity of the faculty and administration. One campus indicated they have an extensive faculty development initiative to identify emerging campus leaders, cultivate their interest, and fund their development both on and off campus (Banta, 2002). These findings are consistent with Maki’s and Astin’s work related to working with faculty and administrators to improve and sustain assessment.

The American Association for Higher Education developed a set of nine guiding principles of good practice in assessment. Banta et al. (1996) added a tenth guiding principle. The ten guiding principles and practices in assessment recommended by the
researchers are: (a) the assessment of student learning begins with educational values; (b) assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time; (c) assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes; (d) assessment requires attention to outcomes, but also and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes; (e) assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic; (f) assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved; (g) assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about; (h) assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change; (i) through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public; (j) assessment is most effective when undertaken in an environment that is receptive, supportive, and enabling.

Summary and Conclusion

Just as assessment has revitalized accreditation, accreditation has revitalized assessment and kept the movement alive and growing. These movements have merged and Banta and other noted researchers (Maki, 2002; Astin, 1993) have indicated that the most powerful contributor to assessment’s staying power is accreditation. In addition, faculty and administrators are beginning to get the message that assessment is not disappearing. If assessment is going to be meaningful, it has to be viewed and treated as an internal initiative for improvement and a contribution to scholarship (Banta, 2002).
General Perspective

The research design for this study was based on a quantitative approach that examines the nature of the relationship between two primary variables: perceived importance and improvements. Based on the research literature, the type of research undertaken by this study was defined as a correlational study. Newton and Rudestam (1999) indicate bivariate correlation coefficient is the most popular variance accounted for measure. Correlational research seeks to determine and understand the existence of patterns of differences and relationships among variables (Glatthorn & Joyner, 2005).

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between the perceived importance of the NCATE assessment standard elements and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. Consistent with the purpose of this study, research questions were developed to explore the nature of the relationship between different variables. The research questions were examined by analyzing data collected from a self-developed survey instrument titled, *Survey of Assessment Elements and Improvements*. The survey asked respondents to rate the level of importance of various elements of the assessment system and to indicate what data was collected and used to make improvements to candidate, program, and unit performance. See Appendix B for a copy of the survey instrument.
Research Context

This study examined the relationship between the importance ascribed to the key assessment elements required for NCATE accreditation and subsequent improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. To this end, the researcher gathered and analyzed information from NCATE accredited four-year higher education institutions in New York State regarding their perceptions of the assessment system elements that are most critical to improving candidate, program, and unit performance.

The universe of higher education institutions in New York State consists of 271 public, independent, and proprietary degree-granting institutions. The population for the study included 45 (17%) four-year NCATE accredited higher education institutions in New York State (see Appendix C). Eighteen of the institutions were from the public sector, including 7 from the City University of New York (CUNY) system, and 11 from the State University of New York (SUNY) system. The remaining 27 institutions were from the independent sector.

Research Participants

The study’s population was drawn from the 45 four-year, higher education institutions in New York State that have received national accreditation by NCATE. All of the institutions received accreditation based on a successful review of their teacher education programs by NCATE. The actual sample included accredited institutions that responded to the study’s survey questionnaire.

The survey respondents were comprised of unit heads or their designees. To increase reliability, each institution was asked to identify the person who was most
knowledgeable about their teacher education unit’s assessment system and have this person complete the survey.

For purposes of this study, a single-stage sampling procedure was used. The researcher had access to the names in the population resulting in the ability to sample the population directly (Creswell, 2003). The population was located in various regions of New York State and comprised of both public and independent institutions. Sixty percent of the population was comprised of independent institutions and forty % was comprised of independent institutions. The actual sample size for the study was 17 or 37% of the total population. Seventy-six percent of the respondents were from independent institutions and 24% were from public institutions.

*Instrument Used in Data Collection*

A survey provides a quantitative or numeric description of some type of characteristic like trends or patterns (Creswell, 2003). This survey method provided the researcher with the opportunity to generalize from the sample population and examine the relationships and differences among the variables in the study. The purpose of the survey was to gather information that would assist the researcher in addressing the research questions of the study.

A comprehensive 58 question survey was used to collect the data associated with this research. To answer the research questions, a self-developed survey instrument was distributed to all public and independent, four year, higher education institutions in New York State nationally accredited by NCATE. The survey was titled, *Survey of Assessment System Elements and Improvements*. The survey items were constructed based on NCATE’s Professional Standards for accreditation as defined in Standard 2: Assessment
System and Unit Evaluation guidelines (Professional Standards, 2006). A full description of Standard 2 and the related requirements can be found in Appendix G.

The self-developed survey is comprised of seven sections. Section I, Information on Survey Respondents, focuses on general respondent information. For example, respondents were asked for their position title, and years of experience in higher education. Section II, General Information on Professional Education Unit, was designed to elicit information about the institution in terms of enrollment size. Section III, Structural Elements, was designed to identify the structural elements of the system that institutions employ to meet national accreditation standards. This section deals specifically with the level of importance ascribed to certain structural elements such as the formal assessment plan, use of consultants, and collaboration with the professional community. Section IV, Operational Elements, was designed to examine certain operational elements of the institution’s assessment system such as implementation and providing data. Section V, Implementation Elements, focused specifically on the use of assessment data to inform decision making at various levels in the unit. Section VI, Assessment Instruments and Improvement Results, was designed to solicit responses about the assessments and indicators used to determine improvements. Section VII, Areas for Further Development and Improvement, was designed to elicit areas of strength and areas needing improvement in the institution’s assessment system.

The survey instrument used a Likert scale to rate responses on perceived importance of the required elements of the assessment system on candidate, program, and unit performance. The following scale was developed for these sections of the survey: (4)

Validity and Reliability

Content validity is a measure of the survey’s accuracy and involves a formal review by individuals who are experts in the subject matter of the survey. Content validity is not based on statistics, but on an overall opinion of a group of expert judges (Litwin, 1995). A reliable survey instrument results in consistent information and a valid survey instrument produces accurate information (Fink, 2006).

To enhance the content validity of the instrument, a panel of assessment experts reviewed the instrument and their comments and feedback were incorporated into the final instrument. The NCATE Vice President of Unit Accreditation agreed to serve as one of the experts. She coordinates research activities related to the accreditation process and is extensively published in the field of assessment. Two additional experts were identified to serve on the panel. Both experts were extremely knowledgeable in assessment and came highly recommended by NCATE and other assessment experts. The collective experiences of these experts included serving as Dean of a College of Education, Chair of the NCATE Standards Committee, Associate Dean of a School of Education, and NCATE Director.

Panel members were asked to review each survey question and determine if it was clear pertinent to the research questions, and appropriate for the respondents. If a question was determined to be unclear, irrelevant, or inappropriate the panel was asked to make suggestions for changes. Each panel member’s comments and suggestions were compiled, reviewed, and incorporated into the survey accordingly by the researcher.
All panel members felt the survey was lengthy and recommended reducing the number of questions by first eliminating those that seemed repetitive or unrelated. The panel members made suggestions for the removal of questions that were not deemed critical to the research questions or appropriate for the respondents. Panel members generally agreed on which questions to eliminate or refine. Two panel members suggested the use of open-ended questions in the last section to capture specifically how units were using data to make improvements and they both commented that a general checklist of indicators would not specify improvement. One panel member suggested changing the rating scale from a five-point to a four-point Likert scale to improve interrater reliability.

The content of and procedures for conducting a survey are critical aspects of the survey implementation process (Fink, 2006). By following the appropriate procedures for conducting a survey, the researcher increases the chances of achieving a better response rate (Dillman, 2000). Web surveys have potential for a more polished appearance and offer a variety of survey capabilities that include skip patterns and drop-down boxes that can make the survey more user-friendly (Dillman, 2000). The Survey of Assessment System Elements and Improvements was administered and completed online using the Zoomerang electronic software program. The survey was numerically coded to ensure the confidentiality of respondents. Coding also was used to ensure accuracy in reporting by position and institution, and to track responses for additional follow-up with non-respondents.

The survey process took approximately two months and included emailing potential respondents an online link to the survey to enhance the response rate. The
survey distribution process for this study was based on recommendations from research
design literature (Creswell, 2003) and the following principles (Dillman, 2000) for online
surveys:

1. Keep the cover letter short so respondents can find the first question.
2. Include a replacement questionnaire with the reminder message.
3. Send a minimum of two follow-up emails.
4. Limit the column width of the questionnaire to reduce wrap-around text.
5. Begin with an interesting and simple-to-answer question.

Dillman (2000) discusses various ways of being positive and showing respect for
the respondents to give them a reason for completing the survey. He also recommends, in
the form of a follow-up post card or email, saying thank you or showing some type of
appreciation for completing the survey. Another strategy he suggests is to appeal to the
values of the group you are surveying. In this case, people who work in assessment are
generally understanding of, and interested in, data collection. Finally, he advocates for
making the survey interesting by improving the layout and design, ordering of questions,
and clarity of questions. He stresses two important elements of survey design, which
include making the survey short and easy and minimizing the request for personal
information.

The initial correspondence was sent to the unit head of each professional
education unit to confirm the email address and title of the unit head and specifically to
request the name and email address of potential designees. See Appendix E for the initial
correspondence document. Thirteen unit heads responded to the initial contact and
provided the name and email of their designee or confirmed they would complete the
survey. The names of the designees and corresponding emails were included in the database. Where appropriate, the designee was sent the survey instead of the unit head.

The second correspondence was the formal contact explaining the purpose of the survey, a link to the survey instrument, and a request to complete the survey (see Appendix F). The electronic survey program featured an automatic email follow-up system for non-respondents. This follow-up feature was used four successive times for non-respondents. Each follow-up request yielded additional responses. The survey was closed eight weeks after its initial launch.

Surveys are methods of collecting information to explain individual knowledge, standards, preferences, and behavior (Fink, 2006). The advantages to survey research, specifically online surveys, include: obtaining the information immediately, analyzing data automatically, and reducing cost (Fink, 2006 and Dillman, 2000). Survey research also was an appropriate method for this study because it supports the use of online surveys for collecting and analyzing large data sets, and distributing survey instruments to larger populations that may be located in a variety of geographical settings (Creswell, 2003).

Procedures for Data Collection and Analysis

Survey results included profiles of the respondents' demographics, professional backgrounds, responsibilities, and perceptions. The respondents reported their perceptions of the assessment system, data collection procedures, and use of data for improvements. The survey also documented perceptions of unit support, resources, and engagement relative to assessment practices. Several questions captured perceptions of
the unit's climate for assessment practices as well as satisfaction with the unit’s assessment system.

The appropriate analysis method for a survey instrument depends on sample size, the survey’s research design, and the characteristics and quality of the data (Fink, 2006). The first step in the analysis process was preparing the data for entry into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) database. Each survey was assigned a number as was each response to each question, which enabled the coding of the data. Each variable was assigned a name for tracking and reference. The survey contained both closed and open-ended questions, so codes were also assigned to the response categories that were created based on the content analysis of the non-structured responses.

In order to analyze the data, several statistical procedures were used. First, descriptive statistical techniques were used to analyze the responses to each item on the survey instrument. The statistical techniques included the use of frequency distributions, mean, standard deviation, and correlation.

The descriptive statistics provided an examination of the distribution of every variable in the data set. The analyses identified the frequency distributions of the sample that responded to each level of the Likert scale. The frequency distribution allows a first impression of the sense of the shape of the distribution (Newton and Rudestam, 1999). Data were analyzed using the bivariate correlation statistical technique.

The data collection procedures and statistical analysis techniques that were used for this study were consistent with the purpose of the study and supported by the literature on correlational research. The procedures and statistical techniques employed
also provided the researcher with the appropriate framework and tools to gather
information and examine the variables in the context of the study's research questions.

This study's research proposal, including the survey instrument, was approved by
the St. John Fisher College Institutional Review Board in December, 2008 (see Appendix
D).
Chapter 4: Results

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between the perceived importance of the elements in the unit's assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. This chapter presents the results of the data analysis based on the study's survey, *Assessment System Elements and Improvements*. The study's survey was designed to examine the extent that the elements of the assessment systems in NCATE accredited units in New York State higher education institutions were perceived as important by the study's participants and whether their perceptions of importance related to improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. Several statistical methods were used to analyze the data and derive the results. Descriptive statistics were used to obtain a profile of the respondents, institutions, and the survey sections. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation coefficient was used to analyze the data from sections I-V of the survey. Section VI and VII of the survey included qualitative data and evaluative summaries were provided.

The study examined and this chapter presents five primary research questions and five secondary research questions. The research questions are aligned with the survey items. This chapter presents a summary of the demographic data and provides a brief profile of each of the respondent's institutions in terms of type of institution and enrollment. Next, the chapter presents the descriptive statistics and correlations for the survey sections that rated the perceived importance of the three elements (structural, operational, and implementation) of an assessment system. Finally, the chapter includes a
summary of the data for sections VI and VII of the survey, which addressed the use of
data for improvements, problems, solutions, strengths of the assessment system, and
future training needs.

Research Questions

The study explored five primary research questions and five secondary research
questions.

1. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain structural
elements of the assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit
performance?

2. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain operational
elements of the assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit
performance?

3. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain
implementation elements of the assessment system and improvements in candidate,
program, and unit performance?

4. Is there a relationship between the perceived and importance of certain
assessment elements of the assessment system and the areas identified for
further development and improvement?

5. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of
the assessment system and the indicators for improvement?

The following secondary research questions were explored in the study.

1. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of
the assessment system and certain demographic variables?
2. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance and of certain elements of the assessment system, demographic variables, and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance?

3. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the assessment system and certain institutional characteristics?

4. Is there a relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the assessment system, certain institutional characteristics, and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance?

5. Is there a relationship between certain demographic variables, institutional characteristics and the areas identified for further development and improvement?

Data Analysis and Findings

Introduction. This section presents the results of the data analyses from the survey administered to unit heads or their designees in NCATE accredited teacher education units. The first area of analysis involved the first two sections of the survey: Section I, Demographic Information and Section II, General Information. The first two sections included the institution's demographic data, which were organized to obtain a profile of each of the institutions based on the type of institution (public or independent) and size of the professional education unit's enrollment (small, medium, or large). For purposes of illustration, the units were categorized as small, medium, or large based on the number of candidates enrolled as full-time and part-time. Small units were categorized as having less than 399 candidates, medium units were categorized as having between 400-999 candidates, and large units had more than 1000 candidates.
There were 17 institutions that responded to the survey. Of the 16 institutions that responded to this question, 1 institution (6%) had less than 100 students. Nine institutions (56%) had more than 100 and less than 700 enrolled students. Six institutions (38%) had more than 700 enrolled students. These findings are presented in Table 4.1.

Table 4.1

_Institution Enrollment_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Size</th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Small</td>
<td>1(6%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medium</td>
<td>9 (56%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Large</td>
<td>6 (38%)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are 45 NCATE accredited higher education institutions in New York State; 18 (40%) are public institutions and 27 (60%) are independent institutions as shown in Table 4.2. Overall, more independent institutions 13 (76%) responded to the survey than public 4 (24%) and more than half of the institutions were categorized as medium size units with enrollments between 100 and 700.

Table 4.2

_Respondent Type of Institution_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Total Universe</th>
<th>Response Rate</th>
<th>% of Universe</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Public</td>
<td>18 (40%)</td>
<td>4 (24%)</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Independent</td>
<td>27 (60%)</td>
<td>13 (76%)</td>
<td>48%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The respondent’s demographic data provided a profile of the respondents to the survey. Each respondent was asked a series of background and demographic questions including: position, years of higher education experience, race and ethnicity, gender, age, and training.

The data indicated that of the 16 respondents to this question, 7 (44%) held the position Assessment Director/Coordinator and 5 (31%) held the position of Dean. Two (12.5%) reported their position as Assistant or Associate Dean and two (12.5%) reported their position as faculty member.

The respondents were also asked to indicate what types of assessment training they had participated in. Of the 16 responses, 12 (75%) had attended an NCATE conference or training and 8 (50%) had attended some type of assessment training through their own institutions.

Eight (50%) of the respondents reported working in higher education 16 or more years, 6 (38%) reported working in higher education 6-15 years and 2 (12%) reported only working in higher education 1-5 years. The demographic profile based on the survey findings indicated that 11 (69%) of the respondents were white and 3 (19%) were African American. One (6%) of the respondents was Asian and 1 (6%) was Hispanic/Latino. In addition, the survey results indicated 11 (73%) of the respondents were female while 4 (27%) were male. Based on the survey results, 12 (75%) of the respondents were between the age range of 40-59 years with 3 (19%) of the respondents more than 59 years of age and only 1 (6%) was between the age range of 30-39 years.

Secondary research questions. The survey items contained in the first two sections of the instrument were aligned with the five secondary research questions as they
explored the relationships between the elements of the system and the various demographic variables. Each item was analyzed in the context of the related research question and the results were presented using descriptive and correlation statistical techniques.

The first secondary research question explored the relationship between the perceived importance of the assessment system elements and certain demographic variables. The three assessment elements perceived as most important and the demographic variables were analyzed using Pearson correlation and the results indicated there was no evidence of correlation.

The second secondary research question explored the relationship between the perceived importance of certain assessment system elements, certain demographic variables, and improvements in candidate program, and unit performance. There was no evidence of correlation between the assessment elements, demographic variables, and improvements.

The third secondary research question explored the relationship between the perceived importance of certain assessment elements and certain institutional characteristics. There was no evidence of correlation between the assessment elements and institutional characteristics.

The fourth secondary research question explored if there was a relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the unit’s assessment system and certain institutional characteristics. Based on the analysis conducted using descriptive and Pearson correlation statistical methods, there was no correlation between the size of
the unit or type of institution and the perceived importance of the elements of the assessment system.

The fifth secondary research question explored the relationship between certain demographic variables, institutional characteristics, and the areas identified for further development and improvement. Based on the analysis conducted using descriptive and Pearson correlation statistical methods, there was no correlation between the areas identified for further development, demographic variables, and the perceived importance of the elements of the assessment system.

Primary research question #1. The first primary research question explored the relationship between the perceived importance of certain structural elements of the assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. Survey Section II, Structural Elements, was comprised of 14 questions using a Likert scale. The scale included the following numeric values and related descriptors for each item: (4) Very Important – significant and essential impact, (3) Important – large impact, (2) Moderately Important – some impact, and (1) Unimportant – no impact.

Based on an analysis of the data, the means derived from the items varied between 2.00 and 3.88. Overall, 94% of the respondents felt all items related to the structural elements of the assessment system were perceived as moderately important to important. Six percent of the respondents indicated that refining the formal, written assessment plan, collaborating with members of the campus community to maintain and improve the system, and collaborating with P-12 and other community partners to maintain and improve the system were unimportant.
The structural element that was perceived as the most important was, *making decisions about candidate performance based on multiple assessments at multiple points before program completion*. The item with the lowest rating and considered moderately important was, *using consultants to help with the design or implementation of the system*. See Table 4.3 which identifies the total number of responses (N), means (M), and the standard deviation (SD) for the findings related to the perceived importance of the structural elements items in Section II of the survey.
Table 4.3

*Structural Elements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting the conceptual framework</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refining the assessment plan</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.53</td>
<td>.800</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using consultants</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.00</td>
<td>1.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with campus community</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.849</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with P-12 community</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>.951</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Developing an assessment committee</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a full-time assessment coordinator</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.82</td>
<td>1.185</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using standards as reference points</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.624</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining validity and reliability</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making modifications</td>
<td>16</td>
<td>3.56</td>
<td>.512</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Making decisions about candidates</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.88</td>
<td>.332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data to show relationships</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.712</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Conducting studies fairness and accuracy</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.94</td>
<td>.748</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Having a budget for system</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.849</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An analysis of the survey items was conducted using Pearson's correlation coefficient. A sample of correlations for the structural element perceived as important are presented in Table 4.4 and all significant correlations are presented in Appendix H.
Table 4.4  

*Structural Elements Correlations*  

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural Elements Survey Items</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>Sig (2 tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Making decisions about candidate performance</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reflecting the conceptual framework</td>
<td>.621</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Examining the validity of data</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintain records of candidate complaints</td>
<td>.622</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect data to improve performance</td>
<td>.616</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Report data to improve performance</td>
<td>.708</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use data to improve performance</td>
<td>.616</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Provide external/internal reports</td>
<td>.648</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refine assessment plan</td>
<td>.643</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborate with community</td>
<td>.623</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Conducting studies to establish fairness, accuracy, and consistency</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining validity and reliability</td>
<td>.682</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Modifications to system</td>
<td>.566</td>
<td>.022</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Use data to improve performance</td>
<td>.753</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring impact of change</td>
<td>.815</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Review data on faculty performance</td>
<td>.631</td>
<td>.007</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*correlation is significant at the .01 level (2 tailed)
The item with the lowest rating and considered moderately important was using consultants to help with the design or implementation of the system. There was a significant correlation at the .01 level with using consultants and having a budget for maintenance of and modifications to the unit's assessment system. One of the respondents did indicate the institution had hired a consultant to design and develop a computer-based system to solve a data management problem. As all respondent institutions are accredited by NCATE and passed Standard 2, the responses may indicate more of a need for technology and data management-related consulting due to the amount of data collected rather than designing or implementing a system.

Another structural element, making modifications to keep abreast of changes in assessment technology and in professional standards was significantly correlated at the .01 level to developing an active assessment committee. A commitment from multiple stakeholders is supported in the literature as faculty and administrative leadership and active involvement in assessment activities are key components in developing and implementing an effective assessment system (Ewell, 2002; Banta, 2002; Womack, 2000; Maki, 2000; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003; and Smith, 2005).

The structural element that was perceived as the most important was, making decisions about candidate performance based on multiple assessments at multiple points before program completion. This structural element was highly correlated to another structural element, reflecting the conceptual framework, and perceived as significant at the .01 level. A conceptual framework is the framework or underlying structure that outlines the mission and values in a professional education unit and is fully defined in Chapter 1.
Respondents were asked to submit candidate, program, and unit improvements based on the use of assessment data. Of the 16 respondents, 14 (88%) indicated some type of improvement based on assessment data, 1 (6%) did not note any improvements, and 1 (6%) indicated the unit was still analyzing data. Based on the responses, candidate, program, and unit improvements were identified. A summary of the areas of candidate, program, and unit improvements identified by the respondents is provided in Table 4.5.

The structural element, *reflecting the conceptual framework*, was referenced in the areas of improvements multiple times by the respondents. Respondents indicated: the assessment system had facilitated a greater emphasis on the conceptual framework’s essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions; assessments are tied to the conceptual framework; and there is more cohesion between the mission and field experiences. These findings are consistent with the literature (Driscoll, 2000; Banta, 2002) and best practices in assessment as one of the guiding principles is that assessment of student learning begins with educational values. Educational values are described in the unit’s conceptual framework as it establishes the shared vision for a unit’s efforts in preparing educators to work in P–12 schools.
Table 4.5

**Summary of Areas of Improvement**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level of Improvement</th>
<th>Area Identified</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Candidates</strong></td>
<td>Focus on student learning and outcomes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Student learning and performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>GPA</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Exam rates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Attention to impact and use of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Lesson plans</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Improved quality of products</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Focus on classroom management</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Programs</strong></td>
<td>Assessments are more coherent, valid, and reliable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Reliable grading</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>More rigorous course assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Elimination of redundant assignments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Change is sequence of program expectations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Developed new programs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessments tied to conceptual framework candidate needs</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Standardized rubrics</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Unit</strong></td>
<td>Changes to policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Assessment of program quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Impact of technology</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>New focus research and teaching research</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Efficiency of procedures and operations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Communication with clinical faculty</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty collaboration</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Aggregation of data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Responsive to community partners</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Greater emphasis on conceptual framework</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cohesive unit mission and goals and field experiences</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Changes to fieldwork structure</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Primary research question #2. The second primary research question explored the relationship between the perceived importance of certain operational elements of the assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance.

Section III, Operational Elements was comprised of twelve questions using a Likert scale. The scale included the following numeric values and related descriptors for each item: (4) Very Important – significant and essential impact, (3) Important – large impact, (2) Moderately Important – some impact, and (1) Unimportant – no impact.

Based on an analysis of the data, overall, 94% of the respondents rated the operational elements as moderately important to very important. Six percent rated reporting data to improve candidate performance as unimportant. The operational element that was perceived as most important was, implementing the assessment system.

Three operational elements were also perceived as important, including: providing data on program quality, analyzing data to improve candidate performance, and maintaining a unit database able to produce reports. The two items with the lowest ratings were using multiple assessments from external sources and maintaining a record of complaints. See Table 4.6 for the findings related to the perceived importance of the operational element items in Section IV of the survey.

An analysis of the survey items was conducted using Pearson’s correlation coefficient. The correlations for the operational elements perceived as most important by respondents are presented in Table 4.7 and all other significant correlations are presented in Appendix I.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementing the assessment system</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.82</td>
<td>.393</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing data on program quality</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing data on unit operations</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.29</td>
<td>.772</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Providing data on candidate performance</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using multiple assessments from internal</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using multiple assessments from external</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.600</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a record of complaints</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>2.88</td>
<td>.857</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting data to improve candidate performance</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing data to improve candidate performance</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting data to improve candidate performance</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.47</td>
<td>.874</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Maintaining a unit database</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.437</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using different technologies</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.12</td>
<td>.697</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.7

Operational Elements Correlations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Operational Element Survey Items</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>Sig (2 tailed)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Providing data on program quality</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refining the assessment plan</td>
<td>.711</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with community</td>
<td>.678</td>
<td>.003</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collaborating with P-12 community</td>
<td>.619</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Implementing the assessment system</td>
<td>.649</td>
<td>.005</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing data to improve candidate performance</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using standards as reference</td>
<td>.741</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting data on candidates</td>
<td>.912</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting data on candidates</td>
<td>.621</td>
<td>.008</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data to inform advising</td>
<td>.656</td>
<td>.004</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data to provide feedback</td>
<td>.789</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing faculty data</td>
<td>.734</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2 tailed)

The operational element that was perceived as most important was implementing the assessment system. Three operational elements were perceived as important: providing data on program quality, analyzing data to improve candidate performance, and maintaining a unit database able to produce reports. These operational elements are
focus on providing and analyzing data to improve performance as well as maintaining a system able to produce reports. These operational elements perceived as important are also supported in the literature. They are critical to the “closing of the loop” process that Woldt (2003) and others discussed and defined as successfully using data to make improvements.

The first operational element perceived as important, implementing the assessment system, was highly correlated at the .01 level to providing data on program quality. These findings also connected to the responses to improvements as respondents indicated that faculty and administrators used assessment data to assess the quality of their programs, to plan for programmatic improvements, and to make several curricular refinements.

The second operational element perceived as important, analyzing data to improve candidate performance, was strongly correlated to six other elements:

1. Using standards as reference, collecting data on candidates
2. Reporting data on candidates
3. Using assessment data to inform academic advising
4. Using assessment data to provide candidates with feedback
5. Reviewing faculty data

These operational elements relate to the collecting, reporting, and analyzing of data to provide candidates with feedback on their progress and performance. In addition, there was a strong link between reviewing data on faculty performance and developing plans for improvement. These findings also aligned with the findings related to improvements as the use of assessment data has led to improvements in candidate and
faculty performance. Specifically, the use of assessment data has led to improved focus on student learning outcomes and performance, improved analysis of candidate strengths and weaknesses, and support for faculty development.

The third operational element perceived as important, maintaining a unit database able to produce reports, was not strongly correlated to any other elements. One respondent reported several problems related to this operational element. Operational elements were cited as obstacles in the assessment process and identified in the survey. Specifically, these respondents identified the following problems related to the operational elements:

1. Managing the data collection, analysis, and reporting process
2. Maintaining a central database
3. Lack of adequate technology for collecting and reporting data

Again, the three operational elements: implementing the assessment system, analyzing data to improve candidate performance, and maintaining a unit database able to produce reports were perceived as important and are also seen as important in the current best practices in assessment literature and support linkages to candidate, program, and unit performance. Research by Banta, et al. (1996) includes related best practices that indicate the operational elements of an assessment system are most effective when they lead to improvements that reflect an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time. The authors also assert that an assessment system works best when it is ongoing and not episodic. These operational elements are part of the assessment process which culminates when assessment results are used to improve future learning (Huba & Freed, 2000).
The two operational elements with the lowest rating of perceived importance were using multiple assessments from external sources and maintaining a record of complaints. The findings on these two elements in this study are consistent with the findings of Woldt’s (2004) study which indicates that assessment data are most used to improve curriculum and instruction and to evaluate programs rather than reports to accrediting agencies and upper-level administration. The implications of these findings will be discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Primary research question #3. The third primary research question explored the relationship between the perceived importance of certain implementation elements of the assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance.

Section IV, Implementation Elements was comprised of 11 questions using a Likert scale. The scale included the following numeric values and related descriptors for each item: (4) Very Important – significant and essential impact, (3) Important – large impact, (2) Moderately Important – some impact, and (1) Unimportant – no impact.

Based on an analysis of the data, overall, 88% of the respondents perceived the implementation elements as moderately important, important, and very important. Twelve percent indicated that reviewing data on faculty performance was not important, 6% indicated reporting unit improvements internally and externally was not important. The operational element that was perceived as most important was, using assessment data to evaluate and improve curriculum. The implementation element, reviewing data on faculty performance and developing plans for improvement was rated the lowest, but was still perceived as important. See Table 4.8 for the findings related to the perceived importance of the implementation element items in Section V of the survey.
Table 4.8

*Implementation Elements*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Items</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing refinements to the system</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to evaluate and improve the curriculum</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.76</td>
<td>.562</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to evaluate and make improvements to instruction</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>.588</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to evaluate and make improvements to field and clinical practice</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.71</td>
<td>.470</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to make budget decisions</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>.728</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to inform strategic planning</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.59</td>
<td>.507</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to inform academic advising</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.618</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to provide candidates feedback on their progress</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.41</td>
<td>.795</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Measuring the impact of any changes</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.06</td>
<td>.827</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reviewing faculty data to make plans for improvement</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.00</td>
<td>1.061</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting unit improvements internally and externally</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>3.18</td>
<td>1.015</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
An analysis of the survey items was conducted using Pearson’s correlation coefficient. The correlations for the implementation elements perceived as most important by respondents are identified in Table 4.9 and all other statistically significant correlations are presented in Appendix J.

Table 4.9

*Implementation Elements Correlations*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Implementation Element Survey Items</th>
<th>r</th>
<th>Sig</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to improve and evaluate curriculum</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data to show the relationship assessment and success</td>
<td>.725</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collecting data to improve candidate performance</td>
<td>.723</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Analyzing data to improve candidate performance</td>
<td>.605</td>
<td>.010</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reporting data to improve candidate performance</td>
<td>.748</td>
<td>.001</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data to improve and evaluate instruction</td>
<td>.912</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using data to improve field experiences and clinical practice</td>
<td>.668</td>
<td>.000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2 tailed)*

The implementation element that was perceived as the most important was *using assessment data to improve curriculum*. As indicated in Table 4.9, the element was strongly correlated to *using data to show the relationship between performance assessments and candidate success, collecting, analyzing, and reporting data to improve candidate performance, and using data to improve instruction, field experiences and clinical practice*. This finding is consistent with the assessment literature (Woldt, 2004;
Maki, 2002), and the perceived importance of using data to improve curriculum has strong connections to improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance.

This finding is consistent with Woldt’s (2004) study which revealed data are most used to improve curriculum and instruction and to evaluate programs and Maki’s (2002) assertion that the goal of assessment is for faculty to interpret and use assessment results to inform pedagogy and curricular design. Maki also indicates that developing an institutional commitment to assessment requires that higher education establish principles of inquiry growing from and sustained by faculty intellectual curiosity. In addition, the research conducted on assessment by Banta et al. (1996) indicates that faculty and administrative leadership should be involved and engaged in assessment in order for units to sustain an assessment system and use data to make improvements in practice and programs.

Primary research question #4. The fourth primary research question explored if there was a relationship between the perceived importance of certain assessment elements of the assessment system and the areas identified for further development and training.

The areas for future development and training are related to the assessment elements that were perceived as important and were categorized as structural, operational, or implementation based on the survey responses in Table 4.10.

The areas identified by the respondents for further development and training were: developing and analyzing qualitative assessments, rubric construction, validity and reliability of assessments, linking performance to standards, performance-based management and accountability, training to analyze data and generate reports using
technology, using data and results for strategic planning, and ongoing training for assessment personnel.

This question was investigated based on the frequency ratings for assessment elements perceived as most important and the areas identified for further development and training. The three assessment system elements that were perceived as most important for each area are outlined in Table 4.11.

Table 4.10

Summary of Future Development and Training Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Operational</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Linking performance to standards</td>
<td>Reporting data</td>
<td>Technology training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Examining validity and reliability</td>
<td>Analyzing data</td>
<td>Use data to inform planning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using multiple assessments</td>
<td></td>
<td>Maintaining database</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Primary research question # 5. This section of the survey addressed the fifth primary research question which explored the relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the assessment system and the indicators for improvement. Section VI Assessment Instruments and Results was comprised of 9 questions designed to identify the indicators used to measure and demonstrate improvements to candidate, program, and unit performance.

The assessment elements perceived as important included: making decisions about candidate performance based on multiple assessments at multiple points before
program completion (structural), implementing the assessment system (operational), and using assessment data to evaluate and improve curriculum (implementation).

Respondents identified the types of assessment instruments used to measure and demonstrate candidate, program, and unit improvements. Associated frequencies are provided in Table 4.12. At the candidate level, the highest frequency for an assessment used to make improvements was the field experience and student teaching evaluations. At the program level, 100% of the respondents indicated they used licensure examination data to aid in determining improvements. At the unit level, the licensure examination data was also reported with the highest frequency at 93%.

The field experience and student teaching evaluations and the licensure exams were the two highest rated indicators of improvement which align with making decisions about candidate performance based on multiple assessments at multiple points before program completion (structural) and using assessment data to evaluate and improve curriculum (implementation).

Table 4.11

Summary of Assessment Elements Perceived as Important

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Structural</th>
<th>Operational</th>
<th>Implementation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Make decisions about candidate performance based on multiple assessments at multiple points before program completion</td>
<td>Implement the assessment system</td>
<td>Use assessment data to evaluate and improve curriculum</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 4.12

*Assessment Instruments Used to Measure Improvement*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Candidate Assessments</th>
<th>Program Assessments</th>
<th>Unit Assessments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>GPA 80%</td>
<td>Licensure Exam 100%</td>
<td>Licensure Exam 93%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Licensure Exam 87%</td>
<td>Course Assessments 93%</td>
<td>Faculty Evals 57%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Graduation Rate 27%</td>
<td>Curriculum Planning 71%</td>
<td>Staff Evaluations 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Field Experience and Clinical 93%</td>
<td>Field Exp. and Clinical 93%</td>
<td>Program Survey 43%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Practice Evaluations</td>
<td>Practice Evaluations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research 73%</td>
<td>Research 43%</td>
<td>Employ Survey 64%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Portfolio 67%</td>
<td>Portfolio 71%</td>
<td>Alumni Survey 71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesson/Unit Plans 80%</td>
<td>Lesson/Unit Plans 79%</td>
<td>Research 36%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other 40%</td>
<td>Program Survey 71%</td>
<td>Field Experience 71%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Instruction 57%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Employer Survey 79%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Work Samples 71%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Other 14%</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Secondary research question #2. This question involved the relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the assessment system, certain demographic variables, and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. The statistical correlations suggested that there was no correlation between the variables.

Secondary research question #4. This question explored the relationship between the perceived importance of certain elements of the assessment system, certain institutional characteristics, and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. The analysis suggested that there was no correlation between the variables.

As discussed in this chapter, there are certain elements of the assessment standards that were aligned to improvements in candidates and programs. The demographic variables of gender, age range, race, and years of service showed no correlation. There was significant correlation among certain demographic variables, however the relationships between these variables were not part of the study.

The three assessment system elements perceived as most important support Banta's (2002) three phases of a successful assessment system: planning, implementation, and improving and sustaining. In the planning phase, all stakeholders are involved, including faculty members and administrators. The structural element making decisions about candidate performance based on multiple assessments at multiple points before program completion is perceived as the most important and demonstrates the planning phase as all stakeholders are involved in determining the assessments and the points as well as the decisions about candidate performance.

Banta's implementation phase includes a clear plan and purpose, objectives, as well as a commitment to improvement. The operational element, implementing the
assessment system, was perceived as the most important element by the survey respondents and aligns with Banta’s implementation phase.

The third stage, *improving and sustaining*, includes the ongoing use of assessment to improve programs and services. The implementation element that was perceived as most important was *using assessment data to evaluate and improve curriculum*.

The three assessment elements perceived as most important support Banta’s three phases of assessment. Assessment is more than the collection of data (Palomba and Banta, 1999) and in order for an assessment system to work; it must be purposeful about the information that is collected. The perceived importance of making changes to improve curriculum is consistent with the research that suggest after data is collected, it must be examined and used to make improvements or changes.

*Secondary research question #5.* This question explored the demographic variables, institutional characteristics, and the areas identified for further development and improvement. Both descriptive and correlation statistical methods were used to analyze the demographic variables and institutional characteristics.

*Summary of Results*

This chapter examined whether the elements of the assessment systems in NCATE accredited units in New York State higher education institutions are perceived as important and lead to improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. The information in this chapter was organized in the context of the study’s research questions, and provides an analysis of the data and summary of the results and findings.

Based on the data presented in this chapter, the five primary research questions and five secondary research questions have been answered. Descriptive statistics and
correlations were used to analyze the data and determine if relationships existed between certain variables. In general, the analyses indicated the presence of significant relationships between certain variables in the primary research questions, but no presence of significant relationships between certain variables in the secondary research questions.

The results of this study indicated that overall, respondents perceived most of the assessment system elements as moderately important to important and certain elements within the system had positive relationships. The majority of respondents also identified areas of improvement to candidate, program, and unit performance based on the use of assessment data. A more detailed discussion of the results and implications of the findings are presented in Chapter V.
Chapter 5: Discussion

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between the perceived importance of the elements in the unit’s assessment system and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. Chapter 5 provides a discussion of the implications of the findings, limitations, recommendations, and conclusions.

This study examined how the perceived importance of elements in the assessment systems may affect the use of assessment results to make subsequent improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. To accomplish this purpose, data were gathered from NCATE accredited, four year, higher education institutions in New York State. The data were analyzed to determine the perceptions of accredited institutions relating to the importance ascribed to the required assessment system elements. These findings were examined in the context of NCATE accredited higher education institutions and their use of assessment data to make improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance.

Summary of key findings. This study revealed key findings related to the assessment system elements, use of data, assessment measures, and training.

There were three key findings related to the structural, operational, and implementation elements. These elements also align with Banta’s (2002) three phases of successful assessment systems (planning, implementation, and improving and sustaining). Based on the survey data, the following assessment system elements were
perceived as most important: (a) making decisions about candidate performance based on multiple assessments at multiple points before program completion (structural/planning), (b) implementing the assessment system (operational/implementation), and (c) using assessment data to evaluate and improve curriculum (implementation/improving and sustaining).

An additional finding from the study related to the use of assessment data for improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. A high percentage (88%) of the respondents indicated some type of improvement based on assessment data, 1 (6%) did not note any improvements, and 1 (6%) indicated the unit was still analyzing data.

Another key finding in the study related to the identified types of assessment instruments used to measure and demonstrate candidate, program, and unit improvements. Field experience and student teaching evaluations and the licensure exams were the two measures receiving the highest ratings on the indicators of improvement.

Professional development and future training were additional findings of this study. The areas for future training are related to the assessment elements that were perceived as important by respondents and were categorized as structural, operational, or implementation. The areas identified by the respondents for future training included: developing and analyzing qualitative assessments, creating assessment rubrics, testing for validity and reliability of assessments, linking performance to standards, developing performance-based management and accountability systems, analyzing data and generating reports using technology, using data and results for strategic planning, and ongoing training for assessment personnel.
Implication of Findings

The findings of the study have implications for practice, policy, professional development, and future research. This study explored specific assessment systems designed and implemented by NCATE accreditation units in higher education institutions in New York State. These systems were similar and characterized by specific elements required for successfully meeting NCATE's Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation. The specific elements included: the assessment system (structural elements), data collection, analysis, and evaluation (operational elements), and use of data for program and unit improvement (implementation elements). These elements are part of the NCATE accreditation standard for assessment and are recognized as critical to successful an effective systems by scholars and practitioners. The connection of assessment and accreditation in the last 15 years has been powerful and is evident in the continuing development of the assessment systems designed to meet accreditation standards.

There are certain segments in the higher education community that view accreditation and assessment as negative and see accreditation as only externally motivated. However, in the last several years there has been a growing segment in the higher education community that view the accreditation as positive and having contributed significantly to the advancement of assessment for purposes of improving practices, programs, and candidate outcomes. Many practitioners and scholars acknowledge the tensions between the two movements. Wright (2002) asserts that the movements have strengthened each other and suggests that accreditation has supported the development of resources and motivating institutions to implement assessment systems. The findings of this study and the experiences of this researcher are consistent
with Wright's assertions. This researcher maintains that when assessment systems and accreditation requirements are implemented in concert, institutions are strategically situated to improve candidate, program, and unit performance. Wright (2002) and Driscoll (2006) stated that assessment and accreditation can mutually coexist and drive each other to improve and develop best practices in assessment.

Practice. Driscoll (2006) defines “closing the loop” or use of data as a process to use data to determine implications for change. One of the most critical phases in the assessment process involves the use of data and related findings to inform institutional decision-making and improve practice. Based on the literature and experiences of this researcher as an NCATE Director, this is one of the most difficult and least understood phases of the assessment process. Although a seemingly difficult process, “closing the loop” is necessary to improve practice (Woldt, 2004). This study revealed that among the operational elements of the system, the element perceived as most important was implementing the assessment system, and the implementation element perceived as most important was using data to evaluate and make improvements to curriculum. These findings are consistent with the assessment literature relating to the use of data to make improvements. This study found that 88% of the respondent institutions were implementing the assessment process and using the results to improve learning. Essentially, these institutions are effectively “closing the loop.”

This finding has implications for professional practice as it signals that higher education institutions that are closing the loop in the assessment process also may be cultivating faculty interest and support for assessment. Astin (1993) indicates that faculty, administrators, and others who conduct assessment activities need to understand why...
they assess and how the results are used. Faculty support and involvement is critical to successful implementation and faculty may begin to engage more in assessment if they embrace it as an effective professional practice that leads to improved performance and programs. Welsh and Metcalf (2003) studied faculty perspectives on assessment and found administrative perceptions of the importance of institutional effectiveness activities to be a significant predictor of the level of faculty buy-in to an assessment system. The administrators (unit heads) in this study perceived using assessment data to evaluate and improve curriculum as important. The work of Welsh and Metcalf and this researcher’s study appear to suggest that corresponding faculty and administrator perceptions ascribing high importance to the use of assessment data in institutional assessment activities tends to decrease resistance to assessment. In other words, the more that assessment is viewed as a collaborative inquiry into and opportunity for candidate, program, and unit performance, the greater the commitment to ongoing assessment. Ultimately, this collective viewpoint leads to an institutional culture or environment that promotes the continuous use of data to improve programs and practices.

Consistent with the above finding, this researcher recommends that institutions implement a formal process for closing the loop. To this end, a unit must regularly and systematically collect and use data for improvement. For this purpose, the researcher developed a template (see Appendix K) to collect information that identifies and describes data-driven changes and improvements to courses, programs, and the unit. Faculty and staff members in the unit submit course, program or unit improvements for each academic year. As a result of the systematic collection and review a wide range of data, modifications, and improvements can be readily made in the unit and its programs.
This practice engages faculty and staff in a reflective and continuous process of closing the loop, and provides hard evidence of improvements based on the analysis and use of data. Palomba and Banta (1999) indicate assessment information is of little use if not shared with stakeholders in meaningful ways.

The structural element perceived as most important was, *making decisions about candidate performance based on multiple assessments and multiple points*. This finding was consistent with other studies such as Woldt’s (2004), which revealed data are most often used to improve curriculum and instruction and to evaluate programs. The findings also are consistent with Maki’s (2002) assertion that the goal is for faculty to interpret and use assessment results to inform pedagogy and curricular design. This structural element further aligns with Banta’s (2002) research that suggests learning is multidimensional and requires multiple measures to assess. Banta explains that the use of multiple measures and multiple points helps look for confirming evidence among the collective findings to make improvements. Consistent with the research, this researcher proposes that assessment systems include multiple measures of performance with progress indicators that examine candidate, program, and unit improvement over time and on a regularly scheduled basis.

Respondents reported the use of both internal and external indicators (assessments). For example, the field experience and student teaching evaluations and the licensure exams were the two highest rated indicators of improvement. The findings from the survey indicated that a wide variety of both internal and external data sources and performance-based assessments are used to measure improvements. During the past decade, there has been continued interest in performance assessment or using student
work samples as opposed to tests (Palomba & Banta, 1999). They define performance assessments as authentic if based on genuine examples of student work. The findings from the survey indicate that respondent institutions included multiple types of measures in their assessment systems to provide data on candidates, programs, and the unit. Again, the level of importance ascribed to the use of multiple measures at multiple points appears to be indicative of an effective assessment system.

These findings and research also suggest that to create value-added and sustained support for assessment, institutions must go beyond the mandates associated with accreditation requirements. Faculty will value assessment more if the purpose is beyond fulfillment of accreditation requirements (Ratcliff et al. 2001). Improving instruction is viewed as having an internal purpose rather than externally mandated purpose. This suggests that beyond the mandates of accreditation, assessment can facilitate a continuous improvement model that focuses on improving professional practice and candidate outcomes.

The notion of value-added and sustained support for assessment also has implications for practice in the context of assessment as scholarship. As discussed earlier in this study, the concept of assessment as scholarship relates to systematic work that involves carrying out assessment, determining what methods work best over time, adjusting practice according to new information, reassessing strategies and actions to see if the desired ends were achieved, and sharing the findings with colleagues. In order to integrate the concept of assessment as scholarship into an assessment system, the unit head and assessment personnel must continually strive to encourage, support, and engage faculty in ways that reinforce assessment as a scholarly and important activity.
To support assessment as scholarship, this researcher developed a professional development strategy to promote faculty engagement and provide opportunities for faculty to reflect on how assessment is connected to research and can benefit their pursuit of scholarship. Since faculty at most institutions are at varying levels of experience and interest in assessment, this strategy involves multiple phases. The first phase of the professional development strategy involves working with the entire faculty to provide a comprehensive understanding of the structural and operational elements of the assessment system and the related technologies associated with the system. The second phase is to introduce the faculty to the quality and quantity of data that needs to be collected, analyzed, and reported at the candidate, program, and unit levels. Faculty are most involved at the program level so it is suggested that the training be tailored to share and highlight specific program data that has meaning for them. The third phase of the strategy involves an open forum for faculty reflection about how data can be used to support program improvement and their individual research agendas. One of the goals of this strategy is to move beyond the accountability requirements of the system by stressing the continuous improvement, research, and scholarship opportunities associated with assessment.

Another implication evolving from this study relates to the operational elements of an assessment system. Among the operational elements of the system, the element perceived as most important was implementing the assessment system. The fifth principle of good practice in assessment (Banta, 1997), specifically addresses the implementation of the assessment system. Principle five suggests that an assessment system works best when it is ongoing and not episodic. In other words, the system must be integral part of
The routine practices of an institution and be continuously maintained. Banta (2002) discusses the underlying philosophy for assessment as a tool to inspire continuous improvement. Although new implementation methods and approaches have been introduced, Banta suggests that continuous improvement occurs when an institution has implemented an effective assessment system. Similarly, Woldt (2002) suggests that all institutions must overcome obstacles to implementing the assessment system based on the principle that successful implementation of the assessment system is dependent upon the continuous completion of the assessment process.

This finding has implications because respondents in this study ascribed a high level of importance to the implementation of the assessment system. Based on the research and this researcher's experience, the concept of continuous improvement serves as the foundation for effective implementation of an assessment system. In this researcher's judgment, understanding and embracing the concept of continuous improvement is a necessary prerequisite to successful implementation of an assessment system. As continuous improvement becomes an integral part of the value system and routine practices of an institution, a "data driven culture" of continuous improvement is manifested and sustained over time.

Policy. As identified in Chapter 2, during the last ten years, public demand for educational effectiveness and accountability in higher education has emerged as a major policy issue. Higher education institutions have been challenged by state and federal education issues to articulate and provide evidence of student and program success. As a state and public policy matter, educational effectiveness and accountability in higher education are being examined and measured on the basis of state and or national
accreditation requirements. The accreditation requirements and standards promulgated by organizations such as NCATE, TEAC, and RATE have been sanctioned by both state and federal governing bodies. These governing bodies have issued regulations requiring higher education institutions to demonstrate educational effectiveness and accountability by meeting the accreditation requirements and standards of an organization (NCATE, TEAC, or RATE) approved by the federal Office of Education. In response to these requirements, many states have adopted policies and regulations requiring higher education institutions to meet accreditation requirements by a date certain or run the risk of losing state approval to offer teacher and school leader preparation programs. All federally approved teacher education accreditation bodies require the development of an assessment system that uses data to inform practice and decisions that lead to improvements and provide evidence of student and program success.

In this study, 88% of the institutions were identified as using assessment data to make improvements, and indicated they were providing evidence of success. Based on the results of this study, the policy implications of state and federal mandated accreditation for higher education institutions would appear to be far reaching in terms of the potential negative or positive impact on the future of teacher and school leader preparation programs. On the negative side, teacher and school leader preparation programs that do not meet certain accreditation benchmarks, standards, and requirements run the risk of losing their approval to offer such programs. On the positive side, teacher and school leader preparation programs that meet accreditation benchmarks, standards, and requirements have taken an important step toward improving programs and candidate outcomes.
Based on the research literature relating to this study and the researcher's experience, state and national policies associated with the accreditation process should be viewed as part of a system of continuous improvement. In this context, this researcher postulates that the road to accreditation and subsequent continuing accreditation can yield significant benefits and ongoing opportunities to improve candidate, program, and unit performance. From this researcher's perspective, the policies relating to accreditation and the use of assessment data to demonstrate specific learning and performance outcomes can potentially help teacher and school leader programs to produce future teachers and school leaders who are better prepared to address the needs of all learners. However, to achieve this outcome, the emphasis on and the perception of the accreditation process must shift from being seen as a required mandate based on state and national policy to an opportunity to support the work of faculty, improve student learning, and prepare teachers and school leaders for successful careers in education.

In the past, assessment and accreditation were seen as an additional administrative task with little or no connection to the work of faculty and student learning. More recently, assessment and accreditation has been mandated by state and federal agencies and embraced by higher education institutions as an integral part of strategic planning and continuous improvement. Accountability and program improvement are also part of the paradigm shift in assessment and accreditation in higher education. Regardless of the type of accreditation, institutions are expected to show evidence of effectiveness at all levels (Lubinescu, Ratcliff, & Gaffney, 2001). There are opportunities to promote the combination of accountability and improvement as part of a progressive assessment
model. Assessment practices and policies are reviewed at both the state and federal levels.

In June 2008, NCATE and TEAC announced an agreement between their respective governing boards to work together on the development of an accreditation system for educator preparation that has multiple pathways to accreditation. Specifically, both boards approved the appointment of a joint NCATE/TEAC Design Team to develop a specific proposal for an accreditation system with multiple pathways to accreditation. This is a prime opportunity to formally solve what Ewell (2006) views as the “dilemma of purpose” and provide a context for integrating compliance and engagement and move to the next level of assessment.

The New York State Board of Regents reviews all institutional accreditation standards every four years. The purpose of the comprehensive review is an examination of the adequacy of the standards for the evaluation of educational quality. In addition, accreditation standards and their applications are examined based on accreditation experience and feedback from the professional community. This type of ongoing review, when applied and shared appropriately can help state and federal agencies and teacher and school leader preparation programs move beyond the traditional mode of accreditation focusing primarily on accountability to a more progressive mode of accreditation focusing on the use of data to support continuous improvement.

Professional development. Another implication of the findings relates to the need for ongoing professional development in the area of assessment. Each respondent identified areas for further development and improvement based on their experience with and knowledge of the unit’s assessment system. It logically follows since the respondent
institutions are all NCATE accredited, the areas cited for future professional development and training are closely related to those of continuing NCATE accreditation issues. Of the 17 respondents, 9 (53%) submitted areas for future training relating to certain NCATE standards for accreditation. Of the 9, 7 (78%) listed items related to data collection, analysis, and evaluation.

In New York State, all higher education institutions were required to be accredited by a nationally approved accreditation organization by 2006. Institutions that selected NCATE as the accreditation organization were required to develop comprehensive performance-based assessment systems. These institutions are in the process of continuing accreditation and are looking to acquire a higher level of knowledge, understanding and application of successful assessment practices. They are also seeking technical assistance, ongoing support, and resources to maintain, sustain, and improve their existing assessment systems. To this end, the researcher recommends that NCATE conduct a needs assessment in each region of the country to determine technical assistance needs and emerging assessment trends. Based on these needs and trends, the researcher further recommends that NCATE establish regional networks and conduct regional workshops that focus on the differentiated needs of its member institutions.

In addition, respondents identified a number of problems that had to be addressed as they developed and implemented their assessments systems. Of the 12 respondents (71%) who completed this question of the survey, 10 (83%) acknowledged problems related to one of the following areas: time management, data management, technology, or engaging faculty. This data has implications for future training and the areas identified
could be addressed at conferences for initial and continuing institutions. In this regard, the study has the potential to inform future program directions and decisions, and training plans in assessment at NCATE, other accrediting bodies, and higher education institutions across the state and country.

The areas for future training are related to the assessment elements that were perceived as important and were categorized as structural, operational, or implementation. The areas identified by the respondents for further development were related to the development of assessments, reporting data, using data for strategic planning, and ongoing training for assessment personnel in the areas of technology and reporting. These findings have implications for future training that could impact the success and further development of assessment systems. Methods of providing and managing assessment information need to be explored and offered to units. This is critical to incorporating data effectively and ensuring its use to improve candidate, program, and unit performance.

The demographic variables of age range, gender, race, position title, and institutional characteristics such as enrollment and type had no relationship to the perceived importance of certain elements of the assessment system. These findings imply that the perceived importance of certain elements of the assessment system were common across all unit heads and types of institutions. This was unexpected as the research indicated that many administrators had varying degrees of understanding and experience with assessment systems. This finding may be explained, however, because all respondents were continuing NCATE accredited professional education units and had already received successful initial accreditation. The level of knowledge and experience
about assessment and the quality of the assessment system may be much higher due to
the continuing accreditation status of the unit.

*NCATE Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation.* There are several
additional implications that can be made based on the findings from the data gathered in
response to the research questions. The first implication is related to NCATE’s Standard
2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation. Thirty-five elements that directly related to
the NCATE Standard 2 requirements were identified on the survey. Of the 35 elements,
28 items (80%) were rated moderately to very important. Seven items (20%) were rated
unimportant by 6% to 12% of the respondents. Of the unit heads or their designees who
completed the survey, 88% to 94% responded that the structural, operational, and
implementation elements identified in the survey were moderately important, important,
or very important. These findings have implications for NCATE and NCATE institutions
as they continuously review and refine the assessment standard and assessment systems.
In addition, the findings affirm that the NCATE assessment system elements may
contribute to the development and implementation of a successful assessment system as
demonstrated through the use of data to make improvements. The following Standard 2
assessment elements were perceived as unimportant to moderately important:

1. Collaborating with P-12 and other community partners to maintain and improve
the assessment systems (48%).

2. Maintaining a record of formal candidates’ complaints and documenting the
resolutions (38%).

3. Reviewing data on faculty performance and developing plans for improvement
(31%).
4. Developing an active assessment committee (31%).
5. Measuring the impact of any changes (27%).

These elements that were viewed as unimportant or moderately important represent all three of NCATE’s Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation elements. All of the elements that were deemed unimportant or moderately important should be reviewed in the context of continuing accreditation needs of institutions. The following recommendations are based on the findings from the study.

Element 1: The Assessment System (structural) requires that the system be developed with the professional community. At this point in the assessment process, continuing institutions may not be relying on the professional community beyond the original development of the system. The recommendation is that units need to continue to share and collaborate with the professional community, but around the continuing institution issues related to the assessment system. The units may work with their assessment community and professional community in a variety of ways such as: sharing data that highlights the effectiveness of the unit, focusing on the use of technology, and providing a successful model for other units on campus.

Element 2: Data Collection and Analysis (operational) requires regular and comprehensive information that includes data on faculty performance and developing plans for improvement. Administrators and faculty may find it difficult to move away from the traditional faculty evaluation models that exit on higher education campuses. In this researcher’s experience modifying practices in teacher evaluation is one of the most difficult areas to change. One of the tensions associated with assessment is that areas identified in of need improvement will be revealed and .the information will be used for
punitive purposes. Similarly, there is reluctance to critically examine teaching practices as there are implications for tenure and promotion. One recommendation is to implement a faculty evaluation system within the unit that provides a comprehensive and systematic evaluation of faculty with the goal of improving and supporting faculty and candidate performance. The system may support the college-wide system, but provides a separate opportunity for faculty to reflect on their professional development needs and move in the direction of a continuous improvement model.

Element 3: Use of Data for Program Improvement (implementation) includes studying the effect of any changes to assure that the intended program improvement occurs. This element of the assessment system is critical and relates to a high level of faculty engagement and the closing of the loop process. A recommendation for including this step of the assessment process is included on the Improvement Form (see Appendix K) developed by this researcher and asks faculty to outline any follow-up to measure impact and improvements as well as describe any additional follow-up studies or measures. This is a continuing accreditation strategy that can lead to further refinements and increased effectiveness in the assessment system. This finding also has implications for assessment as scholarship. This step provides faculty with another opportunity to view assessment as scholarship and contributing to their research agendas. This process reinforces and rewards the continuous use of data to improve programs and practices and increases opportunities for research and scholarship. This process has a reciprocating impact in that the research can be used to inform practice and practice can be used to inform research. This outcome is consistent with the principles of an effective assessment system.
Research. The last implication relates to opportunities for future research in the area of assessment. Specifically, future studies could include NCATE accredited professional education units in other states. An expanded universe and sample size would provide more data to determine if the findings of this study can be generalized to a broader base of NCATE accredited institutions in other states. Future research on this topic may also examine the relationship between assessment practices and discrete candidate learning and unit performance outcomes. Future studies also could examine the relationship between assessment practices in professional education units, candidate, faculty, and unit performance and student outcomes in P-12 education. Finally, future studies could investigate the relationship between state, national, and NCATE accreditation policies and standards and demonstrated candidate, faculty, and unit performance.

Limitations

Based on the research and the data, it is seemingly difficult to ascertain the relationships between certain elements of an NCATE accredited unit’s assessment systems and use of data for candidate, program, and unit improvements. The scope of the study was limited to four-year institutions in New York State that are NCATE accredited. The study did not include institutions that are accredited by different accrediting agencies such as TEAC or Regents Accreditation of Teacher Education ( RATE). Any generalizations that may be inferred from this study are limited to NCATE accredited public and private four-year institutions in New York State.

A second limitation is related to the actual number of institutions that participated in this study. There were 45 NCATE accredited institutions in New York State at the time
that this study was conducted. This represents only 7% of the total universe of 641 NCATE accredited institutions in the United States. The findings reflect a response rate of 37% or 17 institutions in New York State that actually participated in this study.

A third limitation to the study was the type of respondents who participated in the study. The respondents were limited to the perceptions of the unit head or person designated by the institution to complete the survey. The perceptions, therefore, may vary depending on institutional climate, and the experience and position of the person completing the survey. The survey instructions requested that the survey be completed by the person most knowledgeable about the institution’s assessment system. There is a possibility that the person most familiar and knowledgeable about the system might not have actually completed the survey.

A fourth limitation is the lack of validation of the indicators of improvement that were used by the institutions participating in the study. Survey participants were asked to list the indicators used by the unit to measure improvements. However, the participants were not asked to provide documentation of the actual improvements.

**Other Recommendations for Consideration**

Future research on and practical applications for assessment should add to the body of knowledge on assessment and contribute to best practices in assessment. This study provided the basis for future research and further development of best practices in assessment. This study’s purpose is consistent with the original goal of the assessment movement; how to better understand and improve collegiate learning (Ewell, 1991). To this end, the following recommendations are aligned with this study’s purpose and the original goal of assessment.
It is recommended that NCATE commission additional research on assessment systems and their impact on candidate, program, and unit performance. This study should use a mixed method approach designed to provide a richer discussion and additional evidence on how various types of data were collected and used to make improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance.

A future study should focus on the issue of accreditation and assessment in terms of accountability and improvement and how professional education units have successfully included the two views and produced an effective assessment system and as a result, additional research is needed on assessment systems and their relationships to improvement.

Presently, there is no study specific to the perceived importance of the assessment elements related to NCATE's Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation. The survey instrument was designed specifically for this study and validated by a panel of experts and has the potential to become a survey instrument for future studies. With further refinements based on the limitations of this study the survey instrument could be expanded for use in future studies.

NCATE and other accrediting bodies should consider conducting professional development for continuing institutions to address the needs and issues related to refining and sustaining systems that have been implemented. Specific areas for consideration include strategies and best practices for addressing issues and problems such as: time management, testing for validity and reliability in assessment, managing, storing, and reporting data sets; and using technology to support and enhance the assessment system.
NCATE should commission a study to examine the relationship between the successful implementation of assessment system elements based on the NCATE Standards and the relative impact of implementation on P-12 student performance. Much of the literature reviewed discussed the relationship of assessment to improvements in teacher education programs, but did not specifically address the relationship to P-12 student learning.

A related recommendation is for NCATE to support the implementation of more Professional Development School (PDS) sites to conduct action research and to assess the extent that improvements to candidate, program, and unit performance are related to improved student learning in P-12 schools.

It is also recommended that the unit head provide faculty with formal and ongoing opportunities for reflection and discussion on improving teaching and learning. These opportunities should help improve and stimulate understanding of and appreciation for the value of assessment. A higher level of understanding and appreciation for assessment helps bridge the gap between mandated accountability and opportunities for improvement and promotes the concept of scholarship of assessment.

Conclusion

Good assessment is really good research and the ultimate goal of such research should be to help institutions of higher education make better choices and better decisions in operating educational programs that improve candidate outcomes and candidates’ capacity to improve teaching and learning in P-12 schools. Assessment results are of most value when they shed light on the causal connections between educational practice and educational outcomes (Astin, 1993).
A review of the assessment literature was identified in Chapter 2 and provides a context for examining the results of this research. This research concurs with the current literature base and has enhanced the literature on assessment. This study explored NCATE accredited institutions and assessment systems in their professional education units. This study attempted to provide useful information on what needs to occur in the assessment systems of professional education units at NCATE accredited institutions. The study also provided an opportunity for unit heads to reflect on the importance of certain assessment elements in the context of effectiveness as determined by the extent to which they are using assessment data to make improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. This study could benefit other units that are implementing assessment systems for accreditation purposes and who are moving to a culture to one of continuous improvement.

The purpose of this study was to determine if there is a relationship between the perceived importance of the elements in assessment systems and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. The research methodology and findings helped the researcher achieve this purpose. It is the researcher’s hope and desire that the findings and recommendations contained in this study will provide useful information for professional education units as they develop and refine their assessment systems and seek to increase opportunities and support for faculty as they pursue their research agendas and improve practice. Most importantly, it is hoped that the information from this study will contribute to new programs and practices designed to improve the preparation of teachers and school leaders who can have a significant and positive impact on learning outcomes for each student in a P-12 educational setting.
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Appendix A

Banta’s Phases of Assessment

- Planning
- Implementation
- Improving and Sustaining

NCATE Elements of Assessment

- Assessment System
- Data Collection and Analysis
- Use of Data
Confidential
Survey of Assessment System Elements and Improvements

Purpose
The purpose of the survey is to examine the relationship between the importance ascribed to the key assessment elements and improvements in candidate, program, and unit performance. The survey results will provide a profile of the institutions assessment systems and determine if and how institutions are using data to improve their education units. Confidentiality of the survey results will be maintained.

Design
The survey is comprised of seven sections:
- Section I. Respondent Information which focuses on respondent demographic information
- Section II. General Information is designed to solicit information about the institution
- Section III. Structural Elements is designed to identify the structural elements of the assessment system
- Section IV, Operational Elements is designed to examine certain operational elements of the assessment system.
- Section V. Implementation Elements is designed to examine the implementation of the system
- Section VI. Assessment Instruments and Improvement Results is designed to solicit responses about the unit's choice of assessment instruments used and corresponding improvements.
- Section VII. Areas for Further Development and Improvement is designed to solicit areas of strength and improvement related to the assessment system.

Scale
Sections III–V use a Likert Scale to rate responses on perceived importance of the elements of the assessment system on candidate, program, and unit performance. The following scale was developed for these sections of the survey:
4 Very Important – significant and essential impact
3 Important – large impact
2 Moderately Important - some impact
1 Unimportant – no impact

Confidentiality of the participants and survey results will be maintained. Thank you for responding and returning this survey.
Survey Directions
Please complete all sections of the survey and respond to each question based on your knowledge of your unit’s assessment system. Please check the appropriate response.

Section I. Information on Survey Respondent

1. Which of the following best describes your position within the unit? Check all that apply.
   ____ Dean
   ____ Assistant or Associate Dean
   ____ Director of Assessment
   ____ Faculty Program Director or Department Chair
   ____ Other, please identify ____________________

2. How many years have you served in your current position?
   ____ Less than 1
   ____ 1-5
   ____ 6-10
   ____ 11-15
   ____ 16-20
   ____ More than 20

3. How many years have you worked in higher education?
   ____ Less than 1
   ____ 1-5
   ____ 6-10
   ____ 11-15
   ____ 16-20
   ____ More than 20

4. What is your race and or ethnicity? Please check all that apply.
   ____ American Indian or Alaska Native
   ____ Asian
   ____ Black or African American
   ____ Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander
   ____ White
   ____ Hispanic or Latino
   ____ Other, please identify ____________________

5. What is your gender?
   ____ Female
   ____ Male
6. What is your age range?
   _____ Less than 30
   _____ 30-39
   _____ 40-49
   _____ 50-59
   _____ More than 59

7. What type of assessment training have you participated in? Please check all that apply.
   _____ Professional development through institution
   _____ NCATE Conference
   _____ NCATE Training
   _____ AACTE Conference
   _____ AACTE Training
   _____ Other, please identify ______________________

Section II. General Information on Professional Education Unit

1. How many full-time and part-time candidates were enrolled at your institution during the fall 2006 semester?
   _____ less than 1000
   _____ 1000-1999
   _____ 2000-2999
   _____ more than 2999

2. What year did the unit receive initial NCATE accreditation?
   ________ Year

3. What year has or will the unit receive continuing NCATE accreditation?
   ________ Year
### Respondent Directions

The following survey items are designed to identify the perceived importance of certain structural elements in an assessment system. Structural is defined as relating to the way the system was put together or how it works. Please check the appropriate box below that best describes your perception of the level of importance for each survey item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Very Important 4</th>
<th>Important 3</th>
<th>Moderately Important 2</th>
<th>Unimportant 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Refining the formal, written assessment plan.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reflecting the unit’s conceptual framework.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using consultants to help with the design or implementation of the assessment system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborating with members of the campus community to maintain and improve the assessment system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Collaborating with P-12 and other community partners to maintain and improve the assessment system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Developing an active assessment committee.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having a full-time designated assessment coordinator.</td>
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<td>Developing new position(s) to support assessment activities.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using professional, state, and institutional standards as reference points for candidate assessments.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Examining the validity, reliability, and utility of the data produced through assessments on an annual basis.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making modifications to keep abreast of changes in assessment technology and in professional standards.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Making decisions about candidate performance based on multiple assessments at multiple points before program completion.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using data to show the relationship between performance assessments and candidate success.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Conducting studies to establish fairness, accuracy, and consistency of assessment procedures.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Having a budget for maintenance of and modifications to the unit’s assessment system.</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Section IV. Operational Elements

Respondent Directions: The following survey items are designed to identify the perceived importance of certain operational elements in an assessment system. Operational is defined as relating to the operating of something or to the way it functions. Please check the appropriate box below that best describes your perception of the level of importance for each survey item.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Very Important 4</th>
<th>Important 3</th>
<th>Moderately Important 2</th>
<th>Unimportant 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Implementing the assessment system.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing data on program quality.</td>
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<td>Providing data on unit operations.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Providing data on candidate performance at each stage of a program.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using multiple assessments from internal sources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using multiple assessments from external sources.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining a record of formal candidate complaints and documenting their resolution.</td>
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<td>Collecting data to improve candidate performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Analyzing data to improve candidate performance.</td>
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<td>Reporting data to improve candidate performance.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Maintaining a unit database able to produce reports.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using different information technologies to improve the assessment system.</td>
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</table>
**Respondent Directions:** The following survey items are designed to identify the perceived importance of certain implementation elements in an assessment system. Please check the appropriate box below that best describes your perception of the level of importance for each survey item.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Survey Item</th>
<th>Very Important 4</th>
<th>Important 3</th>
<th>Moderately Important 2</th>
<th>Unimportant 1</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ongoing refinements to the assessment system and related analytical techniques.</td>
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<td>Using assessment data to evaluate and make improvements to the curriculum.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to evaluate and make improvements to instruction.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to evaluate and make improvements to the unit’s field and clinical experiences.</td>
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<td>Using assessment data to make budget decisions.</td>
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<td>Using assessment data to inform strategic planning.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using assessment data to inform academic advising.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Using assessment date to provide candidates with feedback on their progress.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Measuring the impacts of any changes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reviewing data on faculty performance and developing plans for improvement.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Reporting unit improvements internally and externally.</td>
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</table>
Section VI, Assessment Instruments and Improvement Results
Please identify the indicators that you use to measure and demonstrate improvements to candidate, program, and unit performance at your institution.

A1. Candidate Improvement (Check all that apply)
☐ GPA
☐ Licensure Exam(s)
☐ Graduation rate
☐ Field Experience and Clinical Practice Evaluations
☐ Research (projects, capstone)
☐ Portfolio
☐ Lesson /Unit Plans
☐ Teacher Work Sample
☐ Other (please list) ________________________

A2. What improvements have you seen as a result of using the data from the assessments listed?

B1. Program Improvement (Check all that apply)
☐ Licensure Exam(s)
☐ Course Assessments
☐ Curriculum Planning
☐ Instruction
☐ Program Survey Data
☐ Employer Survey Data
☐ Field Experience and Clinical Practice Evaluations
☐ Research
☐ Portfolio
☐ Work Samples
☐ Lesson/Unit Plans
☐ Other ________________________

B2. What improvements have you seen as a result of using the data from the assessments listed?
C. Unit Improvement (Check all that apply)

☐ Advising
☐ Assessment System
☐ Budget
☐ Field Experience and Clinical Practice
☐ Strategic Plan
☐ Instruction
☐ Faculty Development
☐ Faculty Evaluation
☐ Staff Development
☐ Staff Evaluation
☐ Student Recruitment
☐ Program Completer Survey
☐ Other

C2. What improvements have you seen as a result of using the data from the assessments listed?
Section VII. Areas for Further Development and Improvement
Please answer the following questions based on your knowledge of the unit’s assessment system.

1. Identify the most significant problems the unit encountered in implementing the assessment system?

2. What solutions did the unit apply in addressing the problems?

3. What are the strengths of the unit’s assessment system?

4. What specific areas of training in assessment would be helpful to members of your Professional Education Unit?

5. Would you be willing to participate in a brief confidential telephone interview of approximately 15-20 minutes to discuss the institution’s assessment practices?
   ____ Yes   ____ No

   If Yes, please provide telephone/email contact information __________________________

Do you wish to receive a copy of the results?
   ____ Yes   ____ No

   If Yes, please provide email contact information __________________________

   .

   .
Appendix C

Research Population

1. Adelphi University
2. Buffalo State College
3. Canisius College
4. College of St. Rose
5. Concordia College
6. CUNY Brooklyn
7. CUNY City College
8. CUNY College of Staten Island
9. CUNY Herbert H. Lehman College
10. CUNY Hunter College
11. CUNY Queens College
12. CUNY York College
13. Dowling College
14. Five Towns College
15. Fordham University
16. Hofstra University
17. Iona College - New Rochelle
18. Manhattanville College
19. Medgar Evers College
20. Molloy College
21. Mount Saint Mary College
22. New York City College of Technology
23. New York Institute of Technology
24. Niagara University
25. Nyack College
26. Pace University
27. Saint Bonaventure University
28. Saint John Fisher College
29. Saint Thomas Aquinas College
30. Siena College
31. State University of New York at Potsdam
32. State University College at Oneonta
33. State University of New York at Fredonia
34. State University of New York College at Brockport
35. State University of New York at Geneseo
36. State University of New York at New Paltz
37. State University of New York at Oswego
38. State University of New York College at Cortland
39. State University of New York College at Old Westbury
40. Stony Brook University
41. Syracuse University
42. Teachers College Columbia University
43. The Sage Colleges
44. University of Rochester
45. Wagner College
Appendix D

IRB Approval

Dear Ms. Wahl:

Thank you for submitting your research proposal to the Institutional Review Board.

I am pleased to inform you that the Board has approved your Expedited Review project, "An examination of assessment systems and best practices at NCATE accredited, four year, private higher education institutions in New York State."

Following federal guidelines, research related records should be maintained in a secure area for three years following the completion of the project at which time they may be destroyed.

Should you have any questions about this process or your responsibilities, please contact me at 385-5262 or by e-mail to emerges@sjfc.edu, or if unable to reach me, please contact the Administrative Assistant to the IRB, Jamie Mosca, at 385-8318, e-mail jmosca@sjfc.edu.

Sincerely,

Eileen M, Merges, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board

EM: jlm

Copy: OAA IRB
IRB: Approve expedited.doc
Dear Unit Head:

I am conducting a study on assessment systems in NCATE accredited professional education units as part of my research in the Ed.D. Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College. In the next few weeks I am going to send you the “Survey of Assessment System Elements and Improvements” to complete based on your perceptions of the assessment system in your professional education unit.

I am sending the survey to the head of the professional education unit to complete or designate someone else in the unit who is knowledgeable about the professional education unit’s assessment system to complete the survey.

Please reply to this email by March 10 to let me know if you prefer that I send you or your designee the survey. Please indicate the email address of your designee if appropriate.

Thank you very much for considering this request. It is my hope that this information will be useful to institutions pursuing initial and continuing accreditation. To this end, the major findings of the study and recommendations will be shared with participating institutions.

Sincerely,

Anne Wahl
Director of Assessment, Certification, and Accreditation
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College
Appendix F

Second Correspondence

Dear Colleagues:

I am a doctoral candidate in the Ed.D. in Executive Leadership Program at St. John Fisher College. The Institutional Review Board at St. John Fisher College has reviewed and approved this study.

I am conducting a study of assessment systems at NCATE accredited institutions. The study focuses on the following two questions:

1. What elements of the assessment system are perceived as important?
2. How are NCATE accredited institutions using assessment data to inform and improve the unit’s programs?

This research will be completed through an analysis of the “Survey of Assessment System Elements and Improvements.” All information will remain confidential and institutions will not be identified. Data from the survey will be maintained in a confidential and secure file that will be accessible only to the researcher. I am requesting your assistance in completing the survey by April 7, 2008.

It is my hope that the information derived from the study will be useful to institutions pursuing initial and continuing accreditation. To this end, the major findings of the study and recommendations will be shared with participating institutions. Thank you very much for considering this request.

Please access and complete the survey by clicking on the following link:

If you have any questions, please contact me via email at awahl@sjfc.edu or by phone at 585.385.8222.

Sincerely,

Anne Wahl
Director of Assessment, Certification, and Accreditation
Ralph C. Wilson, Jr. School of Education
St. John Fisher College
Standard 2: Assessment System and Unit Evaluation

The unit has an assessment system that collects and analyzes data on applicant qualifications, candidate and graduate performance, and unit operations to evaluate and improve the performance of candidates, the unit, and its programs.

2a. ASSESSMENT SYSTEM

UNACCEPTABLE
The unit has not involved its professional community in the development of its assessment system. The unit’s assessment system is limited in its capacity to monitor candidate performance, unit operations, and programs. The assessment system does not reflect professional, state, and institutional standards. Decisions about continuation in and completion of programs are based on a single or few assessments. The unit has not examined bias in its assessments, nor made an effort to establish fairness, accuracy, and consistency of its assessment procedures and unit operations.

ACCEPTABLE
The unit has an assessment system that reflects the conceptual framework and professional and state standards and is regularly evaluated by its professional community. The unit’s system includes comprehensive and integrated assessment and evaluation measures to monitor candidate performance and manage and improve the unit’s operations and programs. Decisions about candidate performance are based on multiple assessments at admission into programs, appropriate transition points, and program completion. The unit has taken effective steps to eliminate bias in assessments and is working to establish the fairness, accuracy, and consistency of its assessment procedures and unit operations.

TARGET
The unit, with the involvement of its professional community, is regularly evaluating the capacity and effectiveness of its assessment system, which reflects the conceptual framework and incorporates candidate proficiencies outlined in professional and state standards. The unit regularly examines the validity and utility of the data produced through assessments and makes modifications to keep abreast of changes in assessment technology and in professional standards. Decisions about candidate performance are based on multiple assessments made at multiple points before program completion and in practice after completion of programs. Data show a strong relationship of performance assessments to candidate success throughout their programs and later in classrooms or schools. The unit conducts thorough studies to establish fairness, accuracy, and consistency of its assessment procedures and unit operations. It also makes changes in its practices consistent with the results of these studies.
2b. DATA COLLECTION, ANALYSIS, AND EVALUATION

UNACCEPTABLE
The unit does not regularly and comprehensively gather, aggregate, summarize, and analyze assessment and evaluation information on the unit’s operations, its programs, or candidates. The unit cannot disaggregate candidate assessment data when candidates are in alternate route, off-campus, and distance learning programs. The unit does not maintain a record of formal candidate complaints or document the resolution of complaints. The unit does not use appropriate information technologies to maintain its assessment system. The unit does not use multiple assessments from internal and external sources to collect data on applicant qualifications, candidate proficiencies, graduates, unit operations, and program quality.

ACCEPTABLE
The unit maintains an assessment system that provides regular and comprehensive information on applicant qualifications, candidate proficiencies, competence of graduates, unit operations, and program quality. Using multiple assessments from internal and external sources, the unit collects data from applicants, candidates, recent graduates, faculty, and other members of the professional community. Candidate assessment data are regularly and systematically collected, compiled, aggregated, summarized, and analyzed to improve candidate performance, program quality, and unit operations. The unit disaggregates candidate assessment data when candidates are in alternate route, off-campus, and distance learning programs. The unit maintains records of formal candidate complaints and documentation of their resolution. The unit maintains its assessment system through the use of information technologies appropriate to the size of the unit and institution.

TARGET
The unit's assessment system provides regular and comprehensive data on program quality, unit operations, and candidate performance at each stage of its programs, extending into the first years of completers’ practice. Assessment data from candidates, graduates, faculty, and other members of the professional community are based on multiple assessments from both internal and external sources that are systematically collected as candidates progress through programs. These data are disaggregated by program when candidates are in alternate route, off-campus, and distance learning programs. These data are regularly and systematically compiled, aggregated, summarized, analyzed, and reported publicly for the purpose of improving candidate performance, program quality, and unit operations. The unit has a system for effectively maintaining records of formal candidate complaints and their resolution. The unit is developing and testing different information technologies to improve its assessment system.

2c. USE OF DATA FOR PROGRAM IMPROVEMENT

UNACCEPTABLE
The unit makes limited or no use of data collected, including candidate and graduate performance information, to evaluate the efficacy of its courses, programs, and clinical experiences. The unit fails to make changes in its courses, programs, and clinical experiences when evaluations indicate that modifications would strengthen candidate preparation to meet professional, state, and institutional standards. Faculty do not have access to candidate
assessment data and/or data systems. Candidates and faculty are not regularly provided formative feedback based on the unit's performance assessments.

ACCEPTABLE
The unit regularly and systematically uses data, including candidate and graduate performance information, to evaluate the efficacy of its courses, programs, and clinical experiences. The unit analyzes program evaluation and performance assessment data to initiate changes in programs and unit operations. Faculty have access to candidate assessment data and/or data systems. Candidate assessment data are regularly shared with candidates and faculty to help them reflect on and improve their performance and programs.

TARGET
The unit has fully developed evaluations and continuously searches for stronger relationships in the evaluations, revising both the underlying data systems and analytic techniques as necessary. The unit not only makes changes based on the data, but also systematically studies the effects of any changes to assure that programs are strengthened without adverse consequences. Candidates and faculty review data on their performance regularly and develop plans for improvement based on the data.

SUPPORTING EXPLANATION:
The unit has a professional responsibility to ensure that its programs and graduates are of the highest quality. The unit manages the assessment system, which includes both program and unit data. Units conduct assessments at the unit or program level or in a combination of the two. Meeting this responsibility requires the systematic gathering, summarizing, and evaluation of data and using the data to strengthen candidate performance, the unit, and its programs. Units are expected to use information technologies to assist in data management. The unit's assessment system should examine the (1) alignment of instruction and curriculum with professional, state, and institutional standards; (2) efficacy of courses, field experiences, and programs, and (3) candidates' attainment of content knowledge and demonstration of teaching that leads to student learning or other work that supports student learning. It should include the assessment of candidates' content knowledge, pedagogical and/or professional knowledge and skills, professional dispositions, and their effects on student learning as outlined in professional, state, and institutional standards and identified in the unit's conceptual framework. The assessment system should be based on the assessments and scoring guides that are the foundation for NCATE's program review process (i.e., licensing exam scores and assessments of content knowledge, planning, clinical practice, and student learning).

Preparation of professional school personnel is a dynamic and complex enterprise, and one that requires units to plan and evaluate on a continuing basis. Program review and refinement are needed, over time, to ensure quality. Candidate assessments and unit evaluations must be purposeful, evolving from the unit's conceptual framework and program goals. They must be comprehensive, including measures related to faculty, the curriculum, and instruction, as well as what candidates know and can do. The measures themselves must be of a quality that can
actually inform the important aspects of faculty, curriculum, instruction, and candidate performance.

Fairness, consistency, accuracy, and avoidance of bias in the assessment system must be considered, especially when the assessments are used to determine whether candidates continue in or complete programs. Attention must be paid to the potential adverse impact of the assessments on a diverse pool of teacher candidates. In addition, the unit assessments and evaluations must consider how to provide and use information constructively from various sources—the unit, field experiences, clinical sites, general education courses, content courses, faculty, candidates, graduates, and employers. Technology should play an increasingly important role in data gathering and analysis, as well as more broadly in unit planning and evaluation.

Assessment systems include plans and timelines for data collection and analysis related to candidates and unit operations. Assessment systems usually have the following features:

- Unit faculty collaborate with members of the professional community to implement and evaluate the system.
- Professional, state, and institutional standards are key reference points for candidate assessments.
- The unit embeds assessments in programs, conducts them on a continuing basis for both formative and summative purposes, and provides candidates with ongoing feedback.
- The unit uses multiple indicators (e.g., 3.0 GPA, mastery of basic skills, general education knowledge, content mastery, and life and work experiences) to identify candidates with potential to become successful teachers or assume other professional roles in schools at the point of entry into programs (as a freshman, junior, or postbaccalaureate candidate).
- The unit has multiple decision points, (e.g., at entry, prior to clinical practice, and at program completion).
- The unit administers multiple assessments in a variety of forms and aligns them with candidate proficiencies. These may come from end-of-course evaluations, written essays, or topical papers, as well as from tasks used for instructional purposes (such as projects, journals, observations by faculty, comments by cooperating teachers, or videotapes) and from activities associated with teaching (such as lesson planning, identifying student readiness for instruction, creating appropriate assessments, reflecting on results of instruction with students, or communicating with parents, families, and school communities).
- The unit uses information available from external sources such as state licensing exams, evaluations during an induction or mentoring year, employer reports, follow-up studies, and state program reviews.
- The unit has procedures to ensure credibility of assessments: fairness, consistency, accuracy, and avoidance of bias.
- The unit establishes scoring guides, which may be rubrics, for determining levels of candidate accomplishment and completion of their programs.
- The unit uses results from candidate assessments to evaluate and make improvements in the unit, and its programs, courses, teaching, and field and clinical experiences.
In the evaluation of unit operations and programs, the unit collects, analyzes, and uses a broad array of information and data from course evaluations and evaluations of clinical practice, faculty, admissions process, advising system, school partnerships, program quality, unit governance, etc.
### Structural Elements Correlations

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**Appendix I**

*Operational Elements Correlations*

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Appendix K

Professional Education Unit
St. John Fisher College
Candidate, Program, or Unit Improvement Description
20007-2008 Academic Year

Candidate, Program, or Unit Area:
Faculty or Staff Name(s):
Date:

Narrative: include the purpose or goal of the improvement/change, area/topic of interest or research, description of curriculum, instruction, or assessment, and include any partners that participated or contributed.

Data Collected: (Please double-click on box and check as appropriate)

- [ ] Informal Verbal feedback from participants
- [ ] Survey/Evaluation form
- [ ] Interviews/focus group notes
- [ ] Course Evaluations
- [ ] Video recording
- [ ] Other (Please list)

Summary of Data:

Program Changes/Improvements: include implementation plan, timeline, and responsible parties.

Comments/Reflections: describe if and how has this influenced or shaped practice, services, research, etc.

Follow-up to Measure Impact and Improvements: please describe any additional studies or measures you are planning.