

**Community College Instructors' and Administrators' Beliefs Regarding Student Learning Outcomes Assessment and the Reaccreditation Process**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **LISA MCNEW CHAPMAN: Community College Instructors' and Administrators' Beliefs Regarding Student Learning Outcomes Assessment and the Reaccreditation Process**

**(Under the direction of M. Gail Jones, Ph.D. and Barbara D. Day, Ph.D.)**

This study examined beliefs of administrators and faculty about the identification of student learning outcomes as it related to the accreditation review process. Five North Carolina community colleges that had recently completed the reaffirmation process participated in the study. One hundred-two faculty and administrators at the five colleges participated in an on-line survey designed to assess beliefs about student learning outcomes, accreditation, and the influence of measuring student outcomes on instructional and institutional practices. Eight faculty and seven administrators participated in an in-depth interview.

Results showed that while most faculty and administrators indicated that they believe that assessing learning outcomes was effective in promoting student success and that instruction was improved at their college as a result of participating in the process of identifying learning outcomes, they were frustrated with the process of developing and assessing learning outcomes for the perceived sole purpose of meeting accreditation requirements. Interview responses indicated variations in understanding of a given college's outcomes assessment plan. Administrators and faculty at the same institutions had different interpretations of 'student learning outcomes,' and different beliefs about the use of learning outcomes assessment at the college. These differences could be correlated to the level of

responsibility and participation of an individual in the reaffirmation process. With limited common understanding, limited resources, and limited time, all faculty initially saw learning outcomes assessment as additional administrative paper work and data collection, with only a few also seeing it becoming a needed integral component of their teaching. The surveys and interviews also showed that faculty and administrators shared very limited support for the decennial reaccreditation process and the usefulness of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools as a tool for improving institutional effectiveness.

## **DEDICATION**

This work is dedicated to my family—my mother, Reba, who has always believed in me and encouraged me, my son and daughter Brandon and Katie, who are the source of my greatest pride and joy, and finally my husband, Jeff, without whose love, guidance, and support I could not have completed this goal.

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

1. AAHE – American Association of Higher Education
2. ACT – American College Testing
3. AP – Advanced Placement
4. CHEA – Council for Higher Education Accreditation
5. CRAC – Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions
6. EC 2000 – Engineering Criteria 2000
7. ECS – Education Commission of States
8. NCCCS – North Carolina Community College System
9. NCHMS – National Center for Higher Education Management Systems
10. NCLB – No Child Left Behind
11. NCPI – National Center for Postsecondary Improvement
12. QEP – Quality Enhancement Plan
13. SACS – Souther Association of Colleges and Schools
14. SHEEO – State Higher Education Executive Officers
15. SLO – Student Learning Outcome
16. ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development

## **Chapter I**

### **Introduction**

A college degree is more important than ever. Almost every division of the economy requires workers with skills and training beyond high school. Globalization presses citizens to have more than “local” awareness. Life is complicated and successfully maneuvering through its maze of challenges is very dependent on education beyond high school (Kuh, 2001). This complication is one of the reasons there is currently such scrutiny of higher education and its accomplishments. Does the United States still have the best higher education system in the world? How is “best” defined and how is an institution’s level of success assessed? These are the questions being asked by legislators, parents, and employers, and higher education must respond.

#### *Context of Problem*

In an issue paper released by the Secretary of Education’s Commission on the Future of Higher Education, Robert Dickeson (2006) stated, “Accreditation of higher education in the United States is a crazy-quilt of activities, processes and structures that is fragmented, arcane, more historical than logical, and has outlived its usefulness. Most important, it is not meeting the expectations required for the future” (p.1). The issue paper alarmed regional accreditors and other college groups as it proposed that legislation be enacted to support a national accrediting foundation rather than to continue with legislation that supports the current regional accrediting agencies. Those in favor of the continuation of regional accreditation believe its strength lies in its diversity and that a national accrediting process

would erode the multiplicity of higher education institutions. There is also a fear that higher education could end up following the path of K-12 public education with “High Stake Testing” and unfunded legislation such as “No Child Left Behind,” often seen as distracting from the real needs in public education.

### *Statement of Problem*

However, while these challenges to higher education may be unfounded or misguided, in fact, they are not new. They have surfaced and resurfaced with varying degree of public and government support over the last two decades. The questions arose in 1983, when Terrel Bell, President Reagan’s Secretary of Education, submitted “A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform” (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983), and some educators and policy-makers believe that these questions regarding higher education’s success have yet to be convincingly answered. The reason the questions seem unanswered may be that higher education institutions really do not know how well they are doing. In *Measuring Up 2000* (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2000), the state report card for education found every state earning an “I” (Incomplete) in the category of student learning. In *Measuring Up 2006* (The National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2006), forty-one states still received an “I” for student learning. Nine states, that are part of a pilot program, received a “+,” indicating some progress in answering questions regarding student learning. However, those nine states have just begun the process of evaluating student learning in higher education. While the regional accrediting bodies have repeatedly responded to the outcry with changes in policy and procedures, no significant change has been noted in higher education practice. It has appeared to be business as usual. Two questions immediately come to mind in response to the concern: “How is it

that there has been little perceived change in higher education evaluation and assessment?,” and if in fact that is the case, “Why has there been so little change in higher education evaluation and assessment?”

An educator’s response to these questions would possibly be that he spends much of his teaching career evaluating and assessing. He might question why there is concern about the current assessment process. However, if his assessment is purposed primarily for the evaluation of his students, the public does not see these assessment results nor does it see evidence of institutional or educator assessment. The students may be learning, but institutions are either not assessing the learning that is occurring or they are not documenting it. Whichever the case, Kuh (2001) suggested that colleges and universities will either determine how to demonstrate student learning on their own, or an external agency may come in and do it for them. This study seeks to identify faculty and administrators beliefs regarding the impact that current accreditation processes have on student learning.

#### *Overview of Theory and Literature*

Beginning in the 1980’s, the view that colleges and universities were not performing well began surfacing in government agencies and the voices of federal and state legislators. In 1984, the National Institute of Education’s report, “Involvement in Learning,” addressed needs such as high student expectations and assessment of learning (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, 1984). This report was followed by more than twenty reports, produced during the last two decades, all stressing the need for major reform in undergraduate education (Schroeder, 2003). During this time, educators began to respond by proposing ideas of best practice in higher education. They recognized that all students do not learn in the same way, and that it is imperative to understand how to

engage all students in active learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1991). Even though educators were promoting ideas of best practice, there was not enough public evidence that interest in teaching practices was a priority in undergraduate education. Legislators and some educators alike claimed that institution evaluations of performance were not transparent enough and that they did not directly assess student learning. The concern then and now is that institutions have been too unwilling to appropriately evaluate themselves and publicly share the results with consumers (prospective students and their parents) and funding agencies.

While legislators continued to voice concerns regarding the success of undergraduate education, colleges and universities remained satisfied that regional accreditation sufficiently addressed any concerns regarding the quality of education students received. Unfortunately, since accrediting bodies are composed of members of the institutions they accredit, this exacerbated some of the concerns. Rather than supporting effective, reliable evaluation of higher education, the evaluation process used for accrediting institutions was seen as serving the institutions' needs more than the needs of the students. With the emphasis on inputs (adequate facilities, resources, and qualified faculty), there was no room for assessing student learning (the institutions' outcomes). While there was very little evidence in any of the reports to validate the discrepancy between what colleges and universities ought to be doing and in fact what they were doing, the outcry did get accrediting agencies' attention. Government talk of lack of accountability in higher education caused regional accrediting agencies and higher education administrators to express concerns that higher education is heading down the same accountability path as K-12 education (Field, 2006b). In particular, the suggestions of a possible national accrediting agency sparked debate regarding the need to maintain the diversity of regional accrediting agencies. Regional accrediting agencies and

the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), the national coordinating body of accreditation, have felt the pressure to strongly encourage institutions to focus more on student learning and institutional effectiveness. These agencies have also felt more pressure to realign their accreditation processes to support this. More emphasis has been placed on assessing outcomes, documenting the assessment of student learning outcomes, and using the assessment of those outcomes to improve teaching and learning.

While instructors in the classroom have been less directly impacted by the public scrutiny, the changes in the reaffirmation process are beginning to impact them as well. Until now, many faculty have viewed the accreditation process as having very little impact on student-teacher interactions. Studies in the allied health field have provided evidence regarding faculty and administrator beliefs about accreditation. Schermerhorn, Reisch, and Griffith (1980) surveyed faculty regarding the principles and processes of accreditation. They found that faculty had much more concern over the process than the principles. They reported that faculty believe in the importance of assessment. Their concern is who manages it and how it is managed. In 2004, Baker, Marrone, and Gable found that while allied health deans and administrators of programs had some concerns about the process of accreditation by their peers, they supported its purpose. However, they were strongly opposed to state and government accountability programs. In a series of discussion papers from Western Washington University, Frye (1999) honed in on the concern that many faculty may have with assessment—the use of assessment and accountability interchangeably. Frye made an important distinction between assessment and accountability. Assessment is a self-evaluation process through which institutions monitor their results to improve what they are doing. Accountability occurs through other agencies evaluating the institutions' results and

penalizing or rewarding them based on the outcomes (Frye, 1999). Faculty are not certain that administrators and legislators understand the distinction (Carey & Gregory, 2003).

Faculty resistance may not stem solely from concerns about how these data may be used. Without a clear understanding of the relationship between program assessment, assessment of learning, and student evaluation, faculty may question whether or not the assessment movement is progressing in line with more recent movements in education. In current learning theory, (constructivism), knowledge is socially and actively constructed. Jonassen, Mayes, and McAleese (1993) researched a constructivist approach to higher education. Their premise was that there is a continuum of knowledge which extends from novice learners through “advanced learners” and that no specific learning environment is “the most appropriate” for every learner. In particular, they saw constructivist environments, while useful for beginning learners, as best suited for the advanced learner found in higher education. When comparing student learning about diffusion and osmosis in constructivist and traditional classrooms, Christianson and Fisher (1999) observed that there was no significant difference between the two in performance on content questions. However, the greatest variation did occur on questions that involved complex reasoning. The results suggested that students taught in a constructivist classroom may develop a deeper understanding of the topics being covered than students taught in a traditional lecture classroom.

If knowledge is no longer perceived as an absolute that can be transferred from teacher to student, then certainly continuous assessment is necessary as the knowledge learners are building is constantly changing. Assessing how students are constructing their understanding of what is being taught is important to the instructor as she guides their



learning in a particular discipline. Since the students' ways of knowing are socially constructed, interactions with peers as well as instructors impact learning. This fluid learning environment requires assessment that is open-ended and ever-changing. Accreditation assessment has its roots in behavior theory where indicators of effectiveness are observable and measurable behaviors. While accrediting agencies, in their opposition to a national accrediting process, are emphasizing the diversity of higher education institutions, their efforts to appease government concern still focus on observable, measurable results. As institutions push to collect measurable, observable data, with vague directives, limited guidance, and limited time, faculty may struggle to see the connection between best practice and current learning theory and the mandate for learning outcomes.

#### *Significance of the Study*

According to Berman and McLaughlin (1978), it is presumed that faculty and administrators have to believe in assessment for it to be effective and sustained (as cited in Gersten, Chard, & Baker, 2000). Klingner, Vaughn, Hughes, and Arguelles (1999) pointed out that when faculty members are being asked to alter instructional practices that are at the core of their teaching or that may be perceived as very time consuming, personal beliefs influence individual implementation of the altered practice. In the middle 1980's and early 1990's, there was a great push for assessment of student learning in higher education, but assessment of learning was being imposed by external agencies, not from within the institutions. Higher education needed collective faculty buy-in and for that to occur, its value and reward system needed some changes. While some modifications were made in recognizing excellence in the classroom, resistance to change minimized the impact of the modifications. Without significant, tangible, internal support for learning assessment, most

faculty viewed assessment as something imposed by external agencies and additional work that had little to do with what occurred in the classroom (Maki, 2002). Legislators and state governments gave up on their attempts to let colleges provide their individualized assessment data, and instead they began to mandate performance funding measures. Data such as persistence, retention, graduation rates, and enrollments could be acquired relatively easily, quantified, and compared among institutions (National Center for Postsecondary Improvement, 2000).

### *Study Overview*

This study investigated North Carolina community colleges' administrator and faculty beliefs, regarding the impact of the regional accreditation process, mandated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) – Commission on Colleges. Community colleges are held to the same accreditation principles and standards as universities as measured according to the governance of SACS. Regional accreditation is essential for a college's students to be eligible for Title IV funds (student financial aid). While the review teams are comprised of members employed at institutions similar to the ones they are reviewing, the standards for higher education accreditation are the same for all colleges and universities.

Community colleges are typically staffed by faculty and administrators who may not be educators by training. They are individuals who received training and education in specific disciplines (general education) or specific professions (vocational and technical programs), and who, for a variety of reasons, moved from other professions into undergraduate teaching and administration. These two-year institutions provide education and training in a variety of technical and vocational programs. The colleges also provide the

first two years of general education requirements for the baccalaureate degree. While adhering to an open-door admissions policy, these institutions seek to maintain standards for their graduates, required by senior institutions, where their students transfer, as well as standards required by a variety of employers who hire the colleges' graduates. While this would suggest that outcomes are continuously evaluated by the faculty and administration of these institutions, as they receive feedback from senior institutions and employers, the documentation of assessment of student learning outcomes is not readily available. Documenting and assessing student learning outcomes has recently become a major focus of these colleges as a result of the reaccreditation self-study (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools: Commission on Colleges, 2005).

In this study, instructors and administrators from five North Carolina colleges were surveyed and interviewed by the researcher as described in detail in Chapter III. In addition, faculty members from both general education and vocational /technical programs at the institutions as well as administrators (deans of general education and deans of vocational/technical programs) were interviewed one-on-one. These data were used to identify patterns of faculty and administrator beliefs about the impact of the assessment of student learning outcomes as it relates to the current SACS reaccreditation process in answering the following research questions:

1. Do curriculum administrators and faculty view regional accreditation as meaningful in the evaluation of and improvement of learning?
2. Do curriculum administrators and faculty believe assessment of student learning outcomes is useful in promoting student and program success?
  - a. Do faculty use student learning outcomes in their teaching?
  - b. Are there differences in the beliefs about assessment and the use of student learning outcomes held by technical and general education faculty and administrators?

### *Organization of the Study*

This study is organized into five chapters. Chapter I provides an introduction to the study, including the context of the problem, the statement of the problem, the overview of theory and literature, the study significance and its overview. Chapter II provides a review of the literature pertinent to the study. Chapter III presents the research design and methodology, including selection of participants, sampling, data collection and analysis procedures. Chapter IV focuses on the findings from the data analysis. Chapter V includes a discussion of the results as well as implications of the study.

## **Chapter II**

### **Literature Review**

#### *Perspective*

The 2006 report produced by Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings' Commission on the Future of Higher Education has alarmed many administrators at higher education institutions and regional accrediting agencies. The report states that the United States is in danger of losing its world-wide lead in higher education.

As other nations rapidly improve their higher education systems, we are disturbed by evidence that the quality of student learning at U.S. colleges and universities is inadequate and, in some cases, declining. A number of recent studies highlight the shortcomings of postsecondary institutions in everything from graduation rates and time to degree to learning outcomes and even core literacy skills. According to the most recent National Assessment of Adult Literacy, for instance, the percentage of college graduates deemed proficient in prose literacy has actually declined from 40 to 31 percent in the past decade. These shortcomings have real-world consequences (Sec1:3, The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006).

In describing some of the proposed necessary changes, the report suggests that there is a need for changes in how higher education institutions are held accountable –changes in terms

of what is used as a measure of accountability and changes in how that information is publicly shared.

Traditionally, institutional quality is measured primarily through financial inputs and resources. In today's environment, these measures of inputs are no longer adequate, either within individual institutions or across all of higher education. . . . Despite increased attention to student learning results by colleges and universities and accreditation agencies, parents and students have no solid evidence, comparable across institutions, of how much students learn in colleges or whether they learn more at one college or another. Similarly, policymakers need more comprehensive data to help them decide whether national investment in higher education is paying off and how taxpayer dollars could be used more effectively. (Sec1:13, The Secretary of Education's Commission on the Future of Higher Education, 2006)

In an issue paper to inform the work of the Commission, Schray (2006) indicated that changes in accountability are currently being debated in light of accreditation processes and their reviews, which are still usually private. The growing debate over needed changes to the United States accreditation system has centered around three primary issues: assuring performance, open standards and processes, and consistency and transparency. In assuring performance, the questions focus on accrediting agencies' accountability in assuring an institution's performance, including student learning outcomes. In open standards and processes, the focus is making accreditation more supportive of innovation in educational delivery. Finally, in consistency and transparency, the focus is on ease of credit transfer

among accredited institutions. Since most institutions offer courses globally, regional accreditation can be perceived as less significant or appropriate.

In response to the Commission's pointed concerns regarding regional accreditation agencies, Belle Wheelan (2006), the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools President of the Commission on Colleges, spoke on behalf of the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions, (CRAC), which is comprised of the seven regional higher education accrediting commissions. She described the importance of regional accreditation in maintaining the diversity of higher education in the United States, and she centered her response on five major points.

First, she indicated that federal mandates suggested by Secretary Spellings' Futures Commission report did not ensure faculty "buy in," which she stressed is essential for institutional success. Secondly, she expressed concern that the Secretary's department did not appreciate the diversity of the regional accrediting agencies. A more centralized approach to accreditation would not support the diversity of education the Commission's report identified as important. Wheelan's third point addressed the portion of the Commission's report focusing on transparency.

Is it reasonable to expect a higher education institution to publish consumer-friendly data about student learning in the areas of value-added learning and student achievement? This is fundamental information for any student and parent choosing a college or university. However, it is unreasonable to expect that this same information—produced in accord with a particular institutional mission—can be fed into a common data base and provide any substantive and credible information after being stripped of its mission specific goals.

What is its value? . . . It would be better to expect the federal government to enhance and improve the collection of information on IPEDS [Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System] and other current tools and use this for the publication of aggregate data, and then expect institutions to provide and publish their own data on student learning specific to their goals and missions (p.3).

In her fourth point, President Wheelan stated that while regional accreditation agencies supported the public sharing of information regarding an institution's performance, there were consequences of this disclosure that could not be overlooked. Findings by an accrediting review committee are used by an institution to address areas of identified weaknesses. The institution's ability to make the needed changes could be hindered if it were spending valuable resources publicly defending itself regarding the findings or if certain sectors of the public were to use the preliminary findings to further their own agenda. The public is best served if accrediting agencies only release final action, “. . . highlighting strengths and weaknesses of the institution and providing areas of needed improvement” (p. 4).

Finally, President Wheelan stressed the connection between institutional capability and student learning. While assessment of student learning outcomes must be the central consideration of institutional effectiveness, an institution must maintain certain ‘inputs’ and ‘processes’ to sustain consistent assessment of those outcomes.

It is clear that federal government representatives are discussing the performance of higher education. They believe that both the government and the public deserve to know more about any given institution's performance. These representatives are not satisfied that



our current accrediting agencies are adequately addressing the challenge of holding higher education accountable for its performance. In an attempt to address these government concerns, in the late eighties, regional accrediting agencies began encouraging outcomes assessment as part of the accreditation process. With very general directives from the Department of Education, the accrediting agencies supplied just as limited directives, as to what specifically should be measured and how it should be documented, to the institutions. Student learning assessment was embedded in overall institutional effectiveness. With no clear directives and no strong emphasis, learning outcomes assessment was inconsistent at best.

### *The Challenge*

The request for documentation of performance has now become a clear directive from accrediting agencies for its member institutions. “Consistent with the logic of ‘No Child Left Behind,’ moreover, accreditors are increasingly being asked not just about whether they examine student learning outcomes in the light of institutional mission, but also why they don't establish and enforce common standards of learning that all must meet” (Ewell and Steen 2007). While more is being asked of the accrediting agencies, as noted in President Wheelan’s comments, the agencies believe they are responding to the request for performance data through the current regional accreditation processes. While Wheelan stresses that faculty “buy in” has not been given any consideration in the Commission’s report; it also may be true that faculty “buy in” may not have been given consideration in the development and implementation of the current regional accreditation processes. While the accrediting agencies are greatly alarmed by the current inquiry, this is not the first time the government has called for educational reform.

### *Government Inquiry*

In 1983, Terrel Bell, President Reagan's Secretary of Education, submitted "A Nation At Risk: The Imperative For Educational Reform." President Reagan was working to deregulate education programs. He wanted to limit federal funding of education, making it the fiscal responsibility of local and state government. During this same period, Secretary Bell reported on how poorly the nation's K-12 schools were educating children. The Secretary's evidence was the declining standardized achievement test scores of high school students as well as declining national average scores on The College Board's Scholastic Aptitude Tests. Secretary Bell indicated that the United States had become a nation of mediocre public education because it had prioritized access over excellence. The report called for nationwide standardized testing to begin "assessing" what was and was not being done in public education (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983). The report encouraged the public to begin questioning why schools were not succeeding in education as they had in the past and what should be done about it. The response to these questions was standardized courses of study and standardized testing--used differently than it had been used in the past. Subsequently, high stakes standardized testing has been adopted by many states, with increasing numbers of subjects being tested. Not only have teachers begun to feel pressure to focus their instruction so that students can perform successfully on standardized tests, but schools also face much tighter credentialing standards with No Child Left Behind (NCLB) legislation of 2001, mandating highly qualified teachers. Public scrutiny of test scores and lack of funding to support NCLB mandates have increased pressure on students, teachers, and local administrators, and there are mixed reports about how the policy has impacted learning. Boaler (2003) noted that math students from a school designated as

“underperforming,” as a consequence of standardized test scores, outpaced many of their peers in other assessments. Increased teacher stress, lower morale, narrowed curriculum, and reduction in student love of learning are some noted unintended consequences of high stakes-testing (Hargrove et al., 2000). In a commentary on NCLB, Mathis (2003) indicated that the true dilemma faced by public education is limited resources. NCLB, as it was put forth in 2001, only added to the financial burden of local education agencies, but just as importantly Mathis suggested that major unintended consequences of the unfunded legislation are a narrowing of the curriculum and an increase in the number of students dropping out of high school. In 2002, Amrein and Berliner compared the scores on the high-stakes tests being administered in eighteen states with scores from other commonly administered tests. The other tests (e.g., SAT, ACT, AP) overlapped the high-stakes state tests in assessment of the same learning domains. Amrein and Berliner did not find that increased high-stakes testing resulted in increased learning. The data only indicated that increased high-stakes testing resulted in increased scores on the high-stakes tests. This could just as easily be the result of improved test preparation as it could be of increased learning. Guisbond and Neill (2004) stressed that while the intent of NCLB is worthy, enhancing the quality of education for all, it simply is not working. The focus on boosting test scores and the punitive response for schools with low test scores undermines the success of the legislation. While federal leaders have not acknowledged the concerns of teaching to the test or narrowing the curriculum, they have taken what they see as another step forward with the release of No Child Left Behind: A Road Map for State Implementation. Unfortunately, the practitioners would question whether or not they are being heard. In a review of NCLB and the modifications proposed for 2005, Linn (2005) suggested that the focus of NCLB is commendable, but the mandated

expectations for all schools are unrealistic, exceeding what the top schools are currently accomplishing. The concern of college and university administrators is that higher education could be heading down the same path.

### *Driving Forces of Assessment*

In a study by the National Center for Postsecondary Improvement (NCPI), Nettles, Cole, and Sharp (1997) reported on the potential benefits of incorporating assessment benchmarks into institutional effectiveness. They included ensuring quality, increasing public accountability, identifying strengths and limitations, increasing efficiency, and identifying alternate needs of funding as the major benefits of a fully implemented assessment plan. Most of the stated benefits provide information to internal constituents, but they can also significantly address concerns of external constituents as well. Government interest in post-secondary educational institutions has been prevalent since the establishment of land grant colleges and universities in the mid 19<sup>th</sup> century. However, as increasing government (state and federal) dollars have been appropriated by these institutions, more and more interest has been directed at their productivity. The measure of productivity has shifted, though. In the 1960's and 1970's, the focus was on quantity. This was followed by a paradigm shift in the 1980's to a more detailed focus on quality. Education's responses included standardized testing in some states, the development of outcomes assessment programs in others, and reports decrying the decline in quality of higher education (Association of American College's *Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community*).

At about the same time, Peter Ewell (1985) wrote a paper for the Education Commission of States in which he stressed that states should be more involved in assessing undergraduate education since they were investing so much funding in their state institutions.

He believed that states should develop policies that supported funding tied to improvement and that there should be regular disclosure and monitoring of this improvement. He realized that the history of autonomous government of these institutions would not support external regulation well, so he suggested that the improvement must come from within the institutions. He noted that there should be positive incentives to improve, but the method of improvement should be left to the institutions as the diversity of higher education needs to be preserved.

In 1986, possibly in response to Ewell's suggestions, the National Governors Association created a task force to consider a state's role in assessment. The task force established five recommendations for higher education institutions. Among these was the recommendation to implement multiple measures of assessing student learning and to share the results with the public. In light of this report, the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO) formed a task force on Program and Institutional Assessment (Nettles, Cole, and Sharp, 1997). This task force also recognized the need for autonomy at individual campuses, but believed that there was also a need for statewide assessment as well. They maintained that there were certain standards that should be subject to statewide assessment; however, this could not include the multitude of criteria each individual institution would need to assess. SHEEO urged states to develop common definitions of retention and graduation and funding formulas that supported established criteria of success. Colleges and universities were encouraged to assess students' academic ability on entrance, not only for placement or remediation, but also so that achievement could be assessed. They were also encouraged to assess other measures, such as graduate performance on state licensure and certification exams; success of students transferring from community college to senior

institutions; satisfaction of alumni; and successful placement of graduates of occupational programs into corresponding employment. In response, some states established policies, some statutes, some both, and some neither. Not surprisingly, even among those states with established policies and statutes, there was great variation in goals and objectives with the focus including public accountability, resource allocation, and curriculum and program evaluation.

In 1987, a survey, of academic officers and state legislators in all 50 states, was sponsored by SHEEO, the American Association of Higher Education (AAHE), and the Education Commission of States (ECS). The results indicated that most of the states had assessment policies, while individual institutions still retained autonomy in the development and practice of their own assessment. There were broad and varied definitions at different institutions within a state, and there were varied degrees of state involvement among states in the assessment of institutions. In 1989, a follow-up survey of SHEEO member academic officers indicated that while there was still great variation among states regarding assessment policies and institution assessment practices, assessment was required by all states; it was more clearly defined at the state level, and all institutions required reporting of some kind. However, information collected in the mid 1990's indicated that very little progress in higher education assessment had occurred after the mid to late 1980's. Funding for training to perform assessment and development of good assessment instruments was lacking, quality of post-secondary education was taking a back seat politically to health care, tax reform, and prisons, and assessment was institution-driven more than being driven by external agencies, (National Center for Higher Education Management Systems [NCHMS], 1996). Colleges and universities simply assessed information that they needed to document to grow and survive

as publicly-funded institutions. While assessment of student learning was still noted as a central measure of institutional effectiveness, supported by all six regional accrediting agencies, in the late 1990's, the agencies were still not assisting with any training or guiding in assessment practices or policies (Nettles, Cole, and Sharp, 1997). Therefore in the late 1990's, the accrediting agencies began to investigate how to assist member institutions in assessing outcomes, specifically targeting student learning and teaching effectiveness, while still allowing the institutions to maintain autonomy.

Even though no movement to help assist institutions in developing and implementing assessment plans got underway until the late 1990's, all of the conversation regarding the problems with higher education inferred there was a lot of data supporting these claims of inadequacy. However, Schroeder and Edgerton (2003) noted that while there were at least two dozen reports indicating the need for reform in higher education, there simply was not a lot of evidence to support the assertions. Edgerton stated that while the public sometimes indicated some modicum of concern, there was no real public push to make higher education changes. The biggest public concern has not been quality, rather it has been cost. Without a major public push for change, there has been no deep commitment to assessment by most institutions. However, assessment is not going away; even though the public has focused its concern more on cost than on outcomes, the government is still focusing concern on higher education.

As discussion of the Reauthorization of the Higher Education Act surfaced in Washington, legislators continued to question the success of higher education in light of the soaring cost of a college degree (Klein, Kuh, Chun, Hamilton, & Shavelson, 2005). With the accessibility of information through electronic media, the federal government began to

expect greater disclosure of data that reflected an institution's success. Traditional performance measures, such as student retention and graduation rates were not viewed as enough. In response, some states developed statewide assessment for all public colleges and universities, for example, Tennessee, Virginia, and Missouri (Nettles et al., 1997). Other states began to establish statewide performance funding measures. These measures were primarily indirect measurements of student success; however, as the federal government increased its interest in higher education assessment, the focus shifted to student learning outcomes (Ketcheson, 2001). While the intensity of scrutiny fluctuates, it is no longer accepted that colleges' and universities' self evaluations are responsive enough to today's demands on higher education. If college teaching is not good, it permeates all of education, as teachers learn to teach from all of their teachers, not just those in teacher-education programs (Schroeder, 2003).

Unfortunately, at the same time that the government is arguing for better prepared graduates, there are decreasing government expenditures to support higher education institutions and greater pressures to make education more accessible to all (massification), including individuals whose educational preparation and financial preparation for college may be limited.

In February 2004, SHEEO announced the establishment of the National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education. The Commission released its report on March 10, 2005. The report presented an analysis of the status of higher education accountability and recommendations for improvement. Suggestions from the Commission included more transparent institutional assessment and establishment, communication of clear student learning goals for institutions, stronger quality control guidelines, and more public findings



for accrediting agencies (National Commission on Accountability in Higher Education, 2005). This public and government inquiry led Secretary of Education, Margaret Spellings, to charter a Commission on the Future of Higher Education in September 2005. She charged the Commission with "...developing a comprehensive national strategy for postsecondary education that will meet the needs of America's diverse population and also address the economic and workforce needs of the country's future" (Spellings, 2005). The Commission was composed of nineteen members including CEOs, university presidents, policy makers, and researchers, with Charles Miller, former chair of the board of regents for the University of Texas System, serving as its chair. There were two public hearings and six meetings as the Commission gathered information for its final report, which was submitted August 1, 2006. The dialog and issue papers leading up to the final report generated alarm among higher education administrators and accrediting agencies. As Congress was debating a provision in the Higher Education Reauthorization Act that would require college accrediting bodies to publicly disclose summaries of all their findings, members of the commission were proposing several changes to the current higher education system. While not all of the proposals made it into the final report, they have come to light publicly through discussion papers written during the development of the final report.

One of the proposals generated significant concern among accrediting agencies. In the discussion paper titled "The Need for Accreditation Reform," Robert C. Dickeson, former president of the University of Northern Colorado and former vice president of the Lumina Foundation for Education, discussed replacing regional accrediting bodies with a national accrediting agency as cited in Bollag (2006). According to Dickeson (2006), the current accrediting process has failed because the accrediting agencies are answerable to the

institutions they accredit; therefore, accreditation serves the institutions more than the public. He also does not believe the process is transparent enough. Consumers should have more data that documents the level of success of all higher education institutions.

Ultimately, the commission focused on increased accountability for student learning, transparency of that accountability, and increased accessibility of a college education as major points of discussion. Secretary Spellings responded to the final report by suggesting that there must be urgency in addressing public concerns. In her comments, she stated that higher education in the United States has become complacent; therefore, changes will occur—some of which will require legislative action. Knowing the involvement of the federal government in K-12 education and sensing the interest of legislators to begin regulating higher education, accrediting agencies are working to respond to ensure their regulation is strong enough and responsive enough (Field, 2006). This has led to a greater emphasis on outcomes assessment. Outcomes assessment has been a part of accreditation policy since 1971 (Morse, 2000). More recently though, there has been an increased emphasis on learning outcomes and institutions' plans for assessing these outcomes. This is quite evident in the changing self-study activities of colleges seeking reaccreditation after 2001.

Typically, accreditation of education involves an in-depth self-study every ten years. In the past, reaccreditation was determined through the measurement of inputs rather than student learning. Numbers of qualified faculty, sufficiency of facilities, and resources were most significantly reviewed under the measure of inputs. However, no measure of inputs shows direct correlation to student learning. In the last twelve years, the accrediting agencies have realized this and worked to redirect the emphasis of assessment. Much of the effort

centers on formative measurement of student learning outcomes. However, this also requires development of learning outcomes as well as an understanding of the most appropriate teaching strategies for promoting student learning. In 1986, leading scholars developed the “Seven Principles of Good Practice in Undergraduate Education” (Chickering and Gamson, 1987). These principles include encouraging contact, communication, and cooperation among faculty and students; encouraging active learning and time on task; providing prompt feedback; and communicating high expectations while respecting diverse talents and learning styles.

### *Components of Best Practice*

In a profile of effective college and university teachers, Young and Shaw (1999) observed that students rated course value as the most important predictor of teacher effectiveness. The course had to be more than just a general education or elective graduation requirement; it had to mean something in the lives of the students. Best practice should result in students not only realizing but appreciating the value of the class. For this to occur, students have to be actively involved in the learning process. In Mastering the Techniques of Teaching, (1995), Lowman stated that effective teaching strategies cause students to be active learners. In addition to encouraging appreciation of course value and active learning, best practice must also encourage cooperation and communication among students and among students and faculty; must communicate high expectations; and must respect diverse talents and ways of learning (Chickering & Gamson, 1991). Effective teachers recognize that their students learn in a variety of ways. Best practice is the teacher and the student working together as active learners with inquiry emphasized as a way of understanding and the teacher constantly looking for innovative approaches to instruction. This partnership or

“shared responsibility of learning” is influenced by the instructors’ relationship with their students and the time they spend reflecting on the learning. This view of teaching and learning promotes a model where faculty constantly assess what their students are learning and use assessment as a teaching tool rather than simply as an evaluation.

Continuous assessment, of what the students are learning and where they are in the learning process, allows faculty to know the existing information with which students are building new ideas. Vygotsky believed that learning was contextualized. He saw an individual's learning as powerfully influenced by his sociocultural and historical background (Wertsch, 1985). Students learn by building on what they already know or believe they know. They will attempt to assimilate new information, associating it with anything familiar that they deem relevant. For instructors to successfully present new ideas to students, the instructors must understand the context in which the students will process the new ideas. Vygotsky also believed that real learning precedes development; in fact, real learning should result in development. With this in mind, he described that the best learning for an individual occurs in her zone of proximal development (ZPD). Each student has an actual developmental level, which is where she can work independently. Each student also has a potential developmental level where she can successfully work, only with the assistance of a more capable peer or instructor. The ZPD occurs between the student's actual developmental level and her potential developmental level. Vygotsky believed that instructors need to assess each student to determine both actual and potential developmental levels and then to design instruction appropriate to the ZPD. In his view of contextualized learning, the ZPD should constantly be changing as the student and the instructor (or capable peer) develop a shared

knowledge. The student's potential should continually be moving to a higher level. This, of course, would require frequent assessment.

Teaching students in their individual ZPD's, as Vygotsky would have us do, would involve individualized instruction. Instructors would need to assess each student to determine both actual and potential developmental levels for the discipline being discussed. According to Vygotsky, (Wertsch, 1985), the shared knowledge between the instructor and students, as well as students and students within small groups, would result in constantly changing ZPD's for everyone. This constant change would require very frequent, almost continual assessment. Very importantly, this assessment would primarily be formative, rather than summative.

#### *Impact (Culture) of Assessment*

Conversations about best practice continued on into the 1990's, with additional emphasis on assessment as a significant component of good practice. As explained by Hatfield and Waterbury (2003), "While many institutions have developed processes and procedures to implement assessment activities on their campuses, few have evolved to the point where they have created—almost ten years into the initiative—a culture of assessment" (p. 29). In fact, according to accreditation and government mandates of the mid-1990's, most institutions did not progress as they should. Administrators had faculty scrambling just to get something done to satisfy the accrediting team with the idea that business could return to normal once the institution was reaccredited. Even though assessment has been touted and encouraged by government and accrediting agencies, it still has not made the significant and lasting impact on teaching and learning quality that advocates have hoped for. Lazerson, Wagener, and Shumanis (2000) attributed this to the limited support from faculty and

institutions for the reform efforts. Angelo (2003) stated that assessment is often piecemealed across the institution. Furthermore, Angelo has expressed that there is a lack of understanding as to how faculty learn and develop; a lack of understanding and appreciation for how change occurs in an academic culture; and a lack of systematic professional development in and support of the scholarship of learning and assessment. Responding to these needs requires resources, both people and money, and while institutions have begun to adjust their rewards systems to accommodate and encourage the scholarship of teaching, external funding has yet to make significant moves in that area.

An example of difficulties in developing a culture of change is seen at Bethany College, a small Lutheran-affiliated four-year institution in Lindsborg, Kansas. For a decade Bethany worked to implement assessment of student learning outcomes, but all efforts produced little significant change. The reasons for this limited change included the need for resources and time to be directed toward shrinking enrollment and repeated turn-over in faculty and administration. Assessment of outcomes was additional work on already overburdened faculty. Successes started to come when the administrators determined that assessment would become a part of what they were already doing rather than an additional job (Lind and McDonald, 2003). The integration of assessment into daily operations required redirecting resources to professional development and providing staff that assumed leadership in the development and practice of assessment. According to Lind and McDonald, faculty buy-in came as faculty stopped seeing assessment as an additional duty and started seeing assessment as a means of improving their students' learning. The College encouraged starting with small steps, and it helped faculty build on success. To this end, they began with establishing and assessing outcomes embedded in courses rather than total program

outcomes. Edgerton (Schroeder and Edgerton, 2003) contends that there must be a grassroots approach supported by faculty interested in knowing how their teaching impacts learning. Is their teaching making a difference or not?

### *Faculty Support*

It might be assumed that outcomes embedded in courses are common. If someone were to ask an instructor if she assessed her student's learning, one should expect the instructor to look at the person a bit incredulously. Of course instructors assess student learning. They always have. They watch body language, listen to questions and comments in class, remember conversations with students during their office hours or when they were just standing and chatting with students somewhere on campus. They respond to poor class performance on an exam by reviewing certain topics, trying different approaches, and spending more time on those topics next time. Instructors assess student learning, in many informal ways, but ask them about outcomes assessment and all of the sudden the conversation appears to shift to accreditation and performance funding—nothing that has anything to do with what really occurs in the classroom. Instructors, program directors, and administrators can quickly become defensive in their response to outcomes assessment; the students earn grades in the course which should be sufficient to indicate proficiency or lack thereof.

Although the “grade” has been accepted without question for many years, now the public and the government want to know more. Do grades indicate what students have learned? Do grades show that students have learned more than they knew when they entered a course or an institution? These questions are driving accrediting agencies' efforts to require documentation of learning outcomes. Yet faculty are frustrated by these efforts as they see

them as either additional paperwork and nothing more, or they see them as a threat to their academic freedom. Faculty must make the connection between successful student learning and outcomes assessment before they will provide the support necessary for successful implementation of course, program, or institution learning outcomes assessment.

As early as 1991, *Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning* were developed under the auspices of the AAHE Assessment Forum, Astin, et al. (1991). The principles emphasize the importance of educational values and stress that assessment must be continuous and multidimensional; must be tied to outcomes and directly related to the learning experiences that lead to those outcomes; and is most effective when it sheds light on concerns that people really care about and when the entire educational community participates. These principles indicate that how learning is assessed is just as significant as what learning is assessed, that assessment works well only if programs have clearly defined goals, and that assessment is only significant if people really care about the questions asked and if the institution truly values teaching and learning. According to Carey and Gregory (2003), while these principles can be found printed on institutional effectiveness or assessment websites of many institutions, faculty, even those who are noted for valuing student learning, often associate “outcomes assessment” with additional paperwork that has no real connection with or impact on what occurs in the classroom. It is as if the methods and tools of outcomes assessment are new to education. However, as early as the 1940’s, Tyler (1949) began describing objectives-based learning in secondary education. This was followed by Blooms Taxonomy in the 1950’s and ultimately a systems approach to meeting specific objectives in the 1960’s. Also in the 60’s, Cronbach (1963) and Scriven (1967)



described formative evaluation with Tyler, Gagne, and Scriven (1967) distinguishing the differences between formative and summative evaluation.

Carey and Gregory believed that all of the above are the basis for outcomes assessment and that there are pieces of all of these in the various education movements (minimum competency testing of the 1970's, standards of the 1980's and accountability of the 1990's that still persists today) over the last 3-4 decades. They see outcomes assessment as having followed two parallel but independent pathways. One pathway is typified by the use of the assessments in strategic planning and institutional effectiveness. This is the pathway aligned with regional accreditation. The other pathway involves the use of outcomes at the course level to improve teaching and learning. While the typical response of those involved in governing and managing education is to converge these two pathways into one, Carey and Gregory see this as a mistake and one of the reasons faculty feel threatened by the process. Outcomes assessment associated with institutional effectiveness and accreditation is not personal — no specific person is solely responsible for it; whereas, course-level outcomes assessment is personal. Course-level outcomes assessment is viewed as a direct reflection of teaching. Converging the two pathways leads faculty to see outcomes assessment as connecting to faculty evaluations and all of the institutional governance associated with and determined by the evaluations. There is no thought of assessment as formative and providing data which can lead to improved student learning; rather it is seen as summative, providing performance data, primarily for punitive purposes. Instead of working to develop faculty understanding of authentic, formative assessment, administrators often try to minimize the perceived impact by simply removing any direct connection between course-level outcomes assessment and the faculty evaluation process, which is the path of least resistance.

Therefore, outcomes assessment becomes exactly as faculty describe it—additional, meaningless paperwork. Faculty apathy regarding outcomes assessment is why Carey and Gregory (2003) believe that not only do institutions need to maintain distinction between the two pathways of outcomes assessment, but that they must make certain that course-level outcomes assessment is in fact tied to the faculty evaluation process. While institutions must be careful to guard academic freedom and diversity of course purposes, the most effective course-level assessment must be pragmatically recognized by the institution to be actively addressed by the faculty. Faculty must be properly educated as to what outcomes assessment is, what it is not, and what the benefits and intentions are. Morse and Santiago (2000) believed that there must be an investment of institutional resources for a culture of assessment to take hold. The energy, thought, and time that must go into planning and developing the outcomes assessment strategies require tangible administrative support.

*Effective Outcomes Assessment in Community Colleges as well as Universities*

While there is a growing body of literature on assessment, most of it is directed at senior institutions. Much of this is useful to community colleges, but the differences between four-year institutions and community colleges in areas, such as student demographics, educational objectives, and breadth of mission, require consideration (Seybert, 2002). Seybert indicated that assessment in community colleges can be grouped into six major areas: general education competencies, transfer success, developmental programs, career and occupational programs, continuing education, and affective characteristics. While these areas differ in their purpose and in the populations they serve, they are still directly tied to student learning. Outcomes assessment involves collecting the data that documents what students have learned and documents how the institution is using the data on student learning

to inform and improve teaching. Supporters of the strength of assessment data believe this allows assessment to inform accountability, institutional effectiveness, and accreditation as it directly measures student learning. Until recently, colleges have primarily relied on indirect measures to support their assertions of student learning. Retention/persistence, graduation rates, end-user surveys, and transfer rates and success have long been the major data supporting program and institution success. However, direct measure of student learning is currently the approach accrediting agencies, government, and the public have insisted is most telling of success and shortcomings.

Effective college assessment should occur at the course level, program level, and institution level. It must have strong support from all college stake holders: faculty and staff, students, and administrators because it is an ongoing process that requires a lot of work (Morante, 2003). While sustained meaningful assessment initiatives benefit from an input of resources, a strong focus on learning is an “issue of will” rather than resources. This resolve is evidenced by the colleges that have continued to support and maintain their paradigm shift from a teaching college to a college that is continuously learning how to produce more learning, even during drastic budget cuts. While outcomes assessment is once again prevalent in evaluation of higher education and currently very prominent in the reaccreditation process, faculty, who have begun to appreciate the value of outcomes assessment and its impact on learning, may still struggle with attaching value to learning or its assessment with reaccreditation.

#### *Faculty Support of Accreditation*

“Stated simply, maybe too simply, university educators usually study others, not themselves” (Myers, 1995, p.4) Accreditation requires a self-study dealing with knowledge

of practice rather than academic knowledge. Myers believed that nearly all types of university scholars work with the construction of academic knowledge rather than the knowledge of practice. Academic knowledge, he stated, can be validated by its own development and theoretical exchange among peer scholars. On the other hand, knowledge of practices is only validated if, when used, it works. This type of validation demands a greater accountability and therefore one that higher education scholars tend to shy away from. Furthermore, this perspective inhibits a self-study process. Myers stressed this as one of the primary reasons faculty reluctantly engage in the self-study process that is such an important part of any current reaccreditation process. Faculty also typically view the process of reaccreditation as disconnected from the learning process or anything that happens between students and faculty. In fact, the connection of outcomes assessment with reaccreditation inhibits its acceptance in the faculty and staff community. To encourage faculty to overcome this resistance, Myers believed it is important to help them see why a change may be necessary. The reasons must not only be real, but faculty must also be able to personally identify with them. Finally, he also stressed that anything new is always evaluated by what is currently known. This approach can lead to misunderstandings. Effective and open dialogue among college administrators and faculty can facilitate an understanding of a needed change, only if the administrators and faculty are as willing to listen as they are to be heard. This dialogue requires time and may, itself, be seen as taking resources away from student learning (Myers, 1995). Therefore, the ideas leading up to the dialogue must be well-researched and understood by the administration. The administration must know what to expect as concerns and must be ready to address those concerns honestly. The faculty must recognize that their 'world' is part of a larger community of educators and learners. They

must see that they do not exist in isolation; that student success is more about learning than it is about teaching, and that their contribution to student learning is one component of a much larger process which requires successful integration of all of the components. Reaccreditation and the associated self-study should help ensure that this integration is occurring; however not only is it not typically viewed as accomplishing this, it also began with a much different purpose—even though it was established by educators.

### *History of Accreditation*

Regional accreditation was established by educators to preserve the status quo of senior colleges and universities and their integrity. Initially, it was primarily concerned with evaluating the secondary schools that were preparing students to enter higher education. There was no real effort by state governments to assess these secondary schools, and the federal government left education to be managed by the states as there was no mention of education in the constitution. Churches could not be involved due to the separation of church and state. Therefore, the colleges and universities found it incumbent on themselves to establish standards of feeder institutions as well as admission criteria. In order for the early prestigious colleges to protect their integrity and maintain their distinguished reputation, they had to ensure there was a qualified pool of potential students from which to select, and they needed to separate themselves from the multitude of new colleges that were not striving to maintain the academic standards required of the prestigious, established institutions. The regional pattern of development followed the pattern of development of schools and colleges. The first schools and colleges were established in the Northeast, followed by those in the Midwest and South, and lastly those in the Western part of the United States (Palinchak, 1993). The numbers of public high schools continued to proliferate in the late 1800's, and

particularly in the South and Mid-West, the focus to prepare students for college, as well as life, resulted in the development of the comprehensive high schools. Comprehensive high schools provided college preparation as well as vocational training. This duality of function increased the prestigious four-year institutions' concern regarding program quality.

Therefore, colleges used regional accrediting bodies to align themselves with the high schools that were maintaining appropriate curricula and standards, based on the Carnegie unit of instruction.

Increasing economic demands on schools and colleges intensified the conflict between the vocational and academic functions of public education, contributing to the development of two-year institutions. Some were developed to provide for the teacher shortage of the 1960's, and some were developed to meet vocational and technical needs; some began to assume the comprehensive roles of preparing students for the university as well as preparing them directly for the changing workforce. This begs the question as to whether or not a regional accrediting process, as it was originally developed, is best positioned to address all of the public concerns regarding the functions of these varied institutions. A study of the regional accrediting agencies demonstrates the great variability in how the different regions approach higher education accreditation (Palinchak, 1993). Some include all two-year institutions with universities and some have special commissions for accrediting two-year institutions, based on their program offerings (i.e., vocational, technical, general education), and some based on completion certifications offered (i.e., degrees, diplomas, certificates).

While the six regional accrediting agencies initially functioned to establish their own membership requirements and uniformity in criteria used to evaluate transition from high

school to college, their roles have grown in response to the diversity in higher education. Early on, institutions just had to meet minimum standards for things like faculty credentials, facility resources, and library holdings. They simply had to prove that they did what they said they did and that they could sustain the process. As the diversity and number of institutions increased around the middle of the twentieth century, a common set of standards simply was not feasible; therefore, the self-study was adopted. Institutions validated themselves by establishing a set of goals that matched their function, and by documenting how they were meeting their goals and could continue to do so. Contemporary accreditations require the addition of documentation that shows how the college impacts “student learning and development” (Palmer, 1993). The governing bodies of these accrediting agencies are chief administrators and leaders of the member institutions. They establish the standards by which institutions are judged; the policy governing operation of the accrediting agency; and ultimately the accreditation of member institutions. Regional accrediting agencies now function to judge how well institutions meet established criteria, help with improving institutions, and support common standards that must be met by all institutions while still supporting diversity of constituent members (Nettles, 1997).

While institutions publicly display accreditation as a stamp of quality, the overriding significance is in funding. Government funding and financial aid for students is provided based on regional accreditation. In the late 1970’s and early 1980’s, regional accrediting agencies began to be charged with being more concerned with institution input than output. Accreditation standards were tied to resources, facilities, faculty credentials, and academic ability of entering students. It made economic sense, as these items had a direct tie to funding needs; however, no assessment of outcomes and results was required. More recently, as state

governments were being encouraged to get more involved in evaluating the success of their higher education institutions, the regional accrediting agencies were also encouraged, both externally and internally, to begin to assess outcomes rather than inputs.

The accrediting agencies responded by realigning their standards and criteria. In 1984, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools adopted assessment to measure institutional effectiveness in terms of instructional practices and learning processes. In 1985, The Middle States Association of Schools and Colleges adopted assessment that focused on institutional, program, and student learning outcomes. In 1988, the Western Association of Schools and Colleges modified its standards to emphasize assessment in each of the following standards of accreditation: institutional effectiveness, evaluation of general education, program review, and co-curricular educational growth. The North Central Association of Schools and Colleges followed in 1989, focusing on assessment of student learning as an essential measure of institutional effectiveness. While regional accreditors were realigning their standards, the federal government added its voice, requiring in 1989 that assessment, including student outcomes, be an integral component of all regional accreditation standards (Morante, 2003). Following closely on the heels of the other agencies, The New England Association of Schools and Colleges developed a Policy Statement in 1992 stressing teaching and learning as a primary focus of the assessment process, and the Northwest Association of Schools and Colleges developed a policy of educational assessment. As a result, the 1980's heralded an era of assessment of outcomes in higher education accreditation that still have implications for today. Unfortunately, what was unclear and not well defined was the extent to which colleges were focusing on student



learning as the primary outcome to be measured. Community Colleges continued with an additional set of concerns with the accreditation.

### *Community College Accreditation*

Even with most community colleges being founded in the 1960's and early 1970's, there still was no sizable body of peer reviewers. There was also a perception problem. Many individuals at universities did not recognize community colleges as colleges. Today, they are evaluated by their peers, but there are still challenges. Very few colleges have staff with any significant training in outcomes assessment. They have limited fiscal resources to support the development of an assessment plan, as all of the planning and development is done by faculty, administrators and staff, in addition to their other duties. Finally, colleges tend to focus on what staff and faculty would do, not on the results of what they had done. The lack of resources and training, along with the limited personnel, can lead to faculty and staff being frustrated with the entire accreditation process (Simmons, 1993).

### *Impact of Accreditation on Student Learning*

Challenges to accreditation are not new. Agencies have responded to both external and internal concerns and modified accrediting criteria and standards to address those concerns. However, the challenges have never been this public before. CHEA and the regional accrediting agencies, as well as program-specific accrediting bodies, acknowledge that student learning outcomes are the defining measure of a program's success. Assessment of student learning outcomes addresses accountability and quality concerns. However, the evidence, that accreditation is more effective through assessment of these outcomes and that the data can be used to improve learning, appears mostly anecdotal.

Very few studies exist that have looked at any evidence of the effectiveness of identifying student learning outcomes and the existing few have focused on institutional responses (probably to support accreditation requirements) rather than evaluation of the direct impact of assessment on student learning. One such study (Volkwein 2006) examined the impact of the implementation of the Engineering Criteria 2000 (EC 2000) for evaluating undergraduate engineering programs. Researchers compared a large number of programs prior to accreditation according to EC2000 and after accreditation according to EC2000. The new criteria (EC2000) targeted student learning outcomes. Among other requirements, programs had to publish specific student learning goals, as well as, assess and demonstrate how well those goals were being met.

In evaluating the impact of EC2000 on student learning, department chairs and faculty reported more emphasis on items, such as teamwork, communication skills, technical writing, lifelong –learning, and use of modern equipment. Faculty also reported that they were using more strategies to encourage active learning, cooperative leaning, and project-based learning. Faculty and department chairs reported strong faculty support of assessment of student learning and continuous improvement. They also reported spending more time researching and learning about teaching and attending professional development focused on teaching.

There were not such overwhelmingly positive reports from faculty regarding changes in reward systems at their institutions. About half of the department heads and faculty indicated that there had been no change in the last decade regarding rewards such as tenure and merit pay. It is important to note that the department chairs responded more positively than the faculty in regards to institution reward systems.

Students also indicated a difference in their learning experience. When 2004 graduates shared their learning experiences as compared to graduates a decade earlier, they reported more collaborative work, more active learning, more instructional feedback and interaction with instructors, and more work-experience, as well as greater participation in professional organizations. Through student self-report, a statistically significant gain was seen in the following learning outcomes:

- Applying knowledge of mathematics, science and engineering knowledge
- Using modern engineering tools necessary for engineering practice
- Using experimental skills to analyze and interpret data
- Designing of solutions to engineering problems
- Functioning in groups and engaging in teamwork
- Communicating effectively
- Understanding professional and ethical obligations
- Understanding the societal and global context of engineering solutions
- Recognizing the need for and engaging in life-long learning

The findings of this study identify program accreditation as a catalyst for change. While the researchers recognize that other factors also play a role in influencing the change, they suggest that these findings lend support for the usefulness of program accreditation.

Whether or not these findings can be generalized to a regional accreditation is not answered by this study. The researchers believe that the here-to-for unwillingness of regional accrediting bodies to identify specific learning outcomes for individual institutions, in deference to their diversity and autonomy, may place limits on what can be accomplished. However, the researchers also suggest that in reality there may be specific learning outcomes that can be established which do not in any way detract from the diverse functions of the multitude of higher education institutions. This is supported by the American Association of Colleges and Universities set of college student outcomes published in the report: *Taking Responsibility for the Quality of the Baccalaureate Degree* (2004).

## *Summary*

There is no question that student learning is the business of higher education. How that learning is accomplished and even whether or not it has been accomplished has been left to the individual institutions to determine. Indirect measures of success, including graduation rates, student retention, success of transfer students, and employer satisfaction, have traditionally been sufficient support for an institution's claims of accomplishment. These coupled with accreditation provided the seal of quality. However, the current climate of accountability has called this acceptance of higher education success into question. Data identifying the assessment of learning outcomes and their use to improve learning is now required by all of the regional accrediting agencies as they move to assure the government and the public that, in fact, accreditation does represent successful learning at an institution. The agencies' success in communicating this is dependent on successful implementation of outcomes assessment at institutions and its sustainability. Both of these are dependent on the relevance of outcomes assessment to college faculty and administration. Therefore, it is imperative to assess whether or not administrators and faculty make the connection between outcomes assessment and student learning; what they need to make those connections; and how accreditation can become a part of what the institution is rather than a seal it must earn and re-earn every ten years.

## **Chapter III**

### **Research Design and Methodology**

This study seeks to determine community college instructors' and administrators' beliefs regarding the impact of the accreditation process that involves identifying and assessing student learning outcomes on teaching effectiveness and student learning. It seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Do curriculum administrators and faculty view regional accreditation as meaningful in the evaluation of and improvement of learning?
2. Do curriculum administrators and faculty believe assessment of student learning outcomes is useful in promoting student and program success?
  - a. Do faculty use student learning outcomes in their teaching?
  - b. Are there differences in the beliefs about assessment and the use of student learning outcomes held by technical and general education faculty and administrators?

#### *Overview*

This phenomenological study involves documenting the beliefs of faculty and administrators of community colleges who have been reaccredited under the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools – Commission on Colleges most recent accreditation process. Faculty as well as administrators were surveyed and/or interviewed. While the participants were all employed at one of five North Carolina community colleges, there were two distinct samples in this research study.

The first group included a larger population of faculty and administrators, from the five colleges, who anonymously completed an online survey. This quantitative data was used to inform analysis of the data collected from the second research population. The second

group was composed of a subset of the first research group. It was a much smaller population whose participants were interviewed one-on-one by the researcher.

### *Sampling*

Participants in this study were drawn from community colleges located in the state of North Carolina. While the community colleges are governed by local Boards of Trustees, they are all part of the North Carolina Community College System (NCCCS) and, therefore, subject to the same state regulations, program approvals, and funding. There are fifty-eight community colleges in the system. Five colleges were chosen as a representative pool. The primary selection criterion of each college was its reaccreditation date. All colleges in the sample were reaccredited under the 2004 SACS accreditation processes. Under the "Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement," colleges are reaccredited based upon the assessment of their compliance with fifteen Core Requirements, fifty-three Comprehensive Standards, and Eight Federal Requirements. The college's self-assessment of these requirements and standards is presented in its Compliance Document, which is reviewed by an off-site team. Satisfactory compliance with the Core Requirements, Standards, and Federal Requirements must be accompanied by an on-site visiting team's approval of the college's Quality Enhancement Plan.

Among the colleges reaccredited in 2004 or later, five colleges were selected as representative of North Carolina community colleges based on the following information. Two of the selected colleges are located in large metropolitan areas and are large North Carolina community colleges, in terms of full-time student enrollment. One of the colleges is located in a smaller metropolitan area and has a full-time enrollment that places it as a medium size college in comparison to other North Carolina community colleges. The fourth

college is slightly smaller in size and is located in a more rural community, while the fifth college is located in a rural community with a small student enrollment. The various sizes, both in terms of student enrollment and the population of community served, provide a stratified sample of North Carolina community colleges.

Random stratified sampling was used to select the potential interview participants. At each college, two curriculum administrators and two instructors were selected for a requested one-on-one interview. The selection was based on the curricula with which the administrators and faculty worked.

### *Participant Contexts*

Community colleges serve multiple missions. Particularly, in terms of the curriculum offerings, they educate and train students to move directly into the workforce in a variety of vocational and technical occupations, and they also prepare students to transfer to the university by providing the general education portion of a baccalaureate degree. According to SACS guidelines, as well as requirements of the NCCCS, graduates of a vocational or technical program may require no general education course work (certificate completers); may only require 6 hours of general education (diploma completers); or may require 15 hours of general education (associate in applied science completers). On one hand, colleges are being asked to integrate the teaching of the general education content with that of the applied skills to make the entire learning experience more rigorous and more relevant (Brewer, 1999). On the other hand, in the same class, general education faculty are teaching students from a variety of vocational and technical programs as well as students who are working on the first two years of the four-year degree. These faculty constantly struggle with supporting the open door admission practice, maintaining academic standards, meeting the needs of all

of the students, and meeting the needs of all college programs. Vocational and technical faculty want their students to think critically, communicate well, and be generally educated, but they focus their efforts on recruiting students, graduating students, and helping their students get jobs. These faculty are frustrated when their students, who are successful in their core coursework and may already be gainfully employed, struggle with completion of general education competencies. They also tend to express their beliefs that they do not need any additional paperwork to document the success they believe they consistently have.

Recognizing these differences in expectations among faculty and administrators who work with vocational and technical programs as compared to faculty and administrators who work with general education courses and programs, the researcher chose to request interviews with administrators and faculty from both divisions of the colleges. The selections were made based on directory information provided on the colleges' websites. According to the individual college's distribution of duties and philosophy, the administrators may or may not teach on a regular basis.

### *Surveys*

Employing more than one research method can provide a more complete portrayal of the data (Oliver-Hoyo and Allen, 2006). Therefore, in addition to the one-on-one interviews, survey data was also collected. All curriculum faculty and administrators at the selected colleges were given access to an online survey. This access was provided with the assistance of the Chief Academic Officer at each college. The researcher sent an email to the Chief Academic Officer (Vice President of Instruction) at each of the five colleges selected for the study (Appendix I). The email described the study and its purpose and requested that the Chief Academic Officers send the email request to complete the survey to all of the full-time



curriculum administration and faculty at the college. The email also assured the Chief Academic Officers of the total anonymity of anyone completing the survey.

By collecting personnel information from each of the college's websites and comparing that with personnel information provided annually about each college by the NCCCS, the researcher determined that there were approximately 980 potential respondents to the survey. The possibility of adjunct faculty being included in the possible total count and not having access to the survey must be taken into consideration. Since the survey was designed to allow for complete anonymity of respondents, the researcher is unable to determine the respondents' colleges. The researcher sent an additional request to the Chief Academic Officers to repeat their request for survey respondents. Each individual who was contacted for an interview was provided information on accessing the survey and asked to complete it as well as to send the information to colleagues and encourage them to complete it. As the researcher accessed the survey daily to determine respondent number, it is believed the greatest response came from division administrator encouragement. There were 102 surveys started and completed. While this is only a little over a 10% response rate based on the estimated number of potential respondents, the researcher could not provide direct incentives to complete the survey as its design was totally anonymous. While the estimated response rate is lower than preferred, the triangulation of the interview data with the survey data provides sufficient data for discussion.

Each administrator and faculty member was initially contacted by email requesting his or her participation in the study (Appendix II). If the selected faculty member or administrator did not respond to the first requests, three, different email requests were sent within a two-three week time period. The email requests were followed by a minimum of two

phone requests. Ultimately, fifteen individuals, including seven administrators and eight faculty, agreed to be interviewed. While the request was for one-on-one interviews, three of the interviews were completed over the phone due to scheduling constraints. Three of the administrators worked with general education programs, three with vocational/ technical programs, and one administrator managed both. Four of the faculty taught general education courses and four of the faculty taught in vocational/technical programs. Two - four individuals were interviewed from any one college (at least one from each division). With representation from each of the five identified colleges, 53% of the participants had teaching responsibilities and 47% of the respondents had primarily administrative responsibilities.

### *Assessment*

As previously mentioned, the researcher conducted a total of fifteen interviews, with twelve of them occurring one-on-one and three occurring over the phone. Each interview was audio taped and transcribed. While the participants had already been introduced to the research through a written description, the researcher began each interview with a brief description of the research. She also provided the participant with a letter of consent that both the researcher and the participant signed (Appendix III). The consent letter was discussed with the phone interview participants and upon their acknowledgement of understanding and agreement, the letter was mailed to them with a return addressed and stamped envelope enclosed. The researcher asked the same ten, open-ended questions in each of the interviews with the interview time varying from forty minutes to ninety minutes, depending on participant answers.

### *Instruments*

Both the survey questions (Appendix IV) and the interview questions (Appendix V) emerged from conversations with community college instructors and administrators at several institutions. Several iterations of questions were developed through review of literature, discussion with the doctoral committee and advisor, and as a result of feedback from a pilot study. The interview questions were ordered to guide the participant from more general thoughts regarding outcomes assessment and reaccreditation to more specific concepts, such as the development of learning outcomes. Questions were also arranged to support relationships or indicate disparities between individual instructional practices and program or institutional practices. The online survey consisted of ten statements each with a Likert scale choice of five responses ranging from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree.” The survey also included one open-ended question and two questions requesting demographic information.

### *Pilot Study*

The study was piloted with an administrator and an instructor at a community college that had just completed its onsite visit in the reaccreditation process. Feedback from these individuals as well as review of their survey and interview responses and discussion with the doctoral committee led to substantial instrument modification. Redundancy of questions was eliminated, and questions were reorganized and reworded to improve clarity. The total number of questions in both instruments was reduced in consideration of ease of completion.

One curriculum dean responsible for technical programs and one faculty member with teaching responsibilities in general education courses were selected to participate. Each individual was initially contacted via email. After both individuals agreed to participate, they

were given access to the electronic survey (Appendix VI). Neither the faculty member nor the curriculum dean knew the researcher either professionally or personally. The researcher did not look at the survey responses prior to interviewing. While both individuals completed the survey (Appendix VII and Appendix VIII), only the faculty member arranged time for a one-on-one interview. The administrator agreed to a phone conversation, but voiced that he struggled with the concept of student learning outcomes. The one interview took approximately 75 minutes, with the researcher asking eighteen questions (Appendix IX). Survey responses from both the administrator and the instructor supported the appropriateness of this study. Both agreed that they, as individual instructors, developed and assessed student learning outcomes prior to the reaccreditation process; however, they did not agree that their college assessed program student learning outcomes prior to the reaccreditation process. The administrator indicated that the college did not assess them at all, while the instructor believed they had "...not used this language before, but we certainly grade our students according to sets of expectations which are the same things as student learning outcomes." They both did agree that the college develops and assesses student learning outcomes currently. When queried as to whether or not students knew the expected learning outcomes for courses, each respondent indicated in the affirmative; however, neither respondent believed that students knew their expected program learning outcomes. The instructor believed that efforts to help students articulate their program outcomes wasted instructional time: "A meaningful student outcome is for students to gain concrete knowledge, to continue to believe after a course that knowledge is fascinating: they should crave the opportunity to apply what they learn and explore their education further, not recite remote and meaningless words that are nothing but vague."

It was determined from the pilot that the questions should focus on instructor understanding of student learning outcomes, instructor development and assessment of learning outcomes, department development and assessment of program learning outcomes, and whether or not the development of student learning outcomes improves teaching or learning. It was especially clear that there are concerns regarding the impact of the SACS reaccreditation process on learning. In response to whether or not the instructor believed the reaccreditation process was helpful to her students, she replied:

I will answer this question in the future tense as we are only in the preliminary stages of assessing student outcomes. From what I understand, the SACS reaccreditation process is ongoing—the QEP, for example, is a five year plan and we are in year 1. Couched in terms of a UT instructor, whose classes reflect the same coursework as freshman and sophomore courses at NCSU and UNC-CH, on balance, the answer is ‘maybe.’ I will ask my student to do more critical thinking in terms of making arguments in class. But really, this entire process takes time and energy away from real teaching. It presumes and asks faculty to think in pedagogical terms that are, to my mind, greatly abstract. I do not find this useful. I think for my students, such language and thinking is even MORE difficult than it is for me and my colleagues. Only the smartest of my colleagues can even get their heads around this endeavor. It asks us to take the time to translate our current teaching practices into these terms. Is this useful for faculty? Maybe, when it forces us to work and talk together, and provides the opportunity for us to learn from each other and to question and refine our teaching practices. For high-quality instructors,

however, this is a waste of time, it is NOT the way that I work nor is it a process through which I imbue my coursework with new ideas and projects and content. Course outcomes are and should be much more specific. The problem for assessments of this nature at the community college lies in scope. The scope of program outcomes in a university transfer program dictates that those outcomes will be vague, generalized. Conversely, the real art of teaching lies in creative strategies to effectively promote, communicate, and apply specific course knowledge. I never met a learning outcome that accomplished this.

#### *Validity and Reliability*

The reliability of this study is supported through the triangulation of the survey responses, the interview data, and the personal experience of the researcher. The questions can be grouped into three major categories: those regarding beliefs about usefulness of the process; those regarding beliefs about departmental work with program student learning outcomes; and those regarding beliefs about personal understanding of and work with student learning outcomes. Analysis of the survey responses indicated a median variance of 1.01 and a median standard deviation of 1.00 on questions addressing departmental development and assessment of student learning outcomes. A median variance of 0.90 and a median standard deviation of 0.95 was determined for responses to questions addressing the usefulness of the process and its impact on teaching and learning, and the least variation among responses was found in questions regarding individual understanding, development, and assessment of student learning outcomes, with a median variance of 0.54 and a standard deviation of 0.74. The reliability of the survey responses is also supported by a Cronbach alpha of 0.9251 as

determined by analysis of questions expected to have a strong correlation within the three major groups indicated above (usefulness of process, beliefs about departmental work, and beliefs about personal understanding).

Validity was established through a review of the items by an expert panel of 1 education researcher, 1 college administrator, and 1 community college instructor.

### *Analysis*

Interview questions were analyzed for emerging themes and consistency of reasoning among participants as described by Creswell (1998). The interviews were transcribed and then analyzed by comparison of the overall perspective of the individual participant's response to the reaccreditation process, comparison of the response to each question among participants, according to the following participant grouping: college size, position at college, college division, and level of involvement in reaccreditation process. This analysis was then re-examined with the questions grouped into the three main categories of *process usefulness*, *individual understanding and work with student learning outcomes*, and *department work with program student learning outcomes*. During the coding of the data, the researcher identified statements that indicate common beliefs and experiences, as well as reflective teaching (instructor as learner), and knowledge of current research on best practice, specifically including outcome assessment. Emerging patterns of beliefs, regarding outcomes assessment and accreditation as they relate to teaching and learning, developed. Analysis of survey responses involved descriptive statistics and comparison with related interview question responses.

### *Limitations and Summary*

A primary assumption made in this study is that participants' answers will reflect what they truly believe. There is some concern that individuals may have provided more guarded answers during the one-on-one interviews; however, the survey is completely anonymous and provides a safe opportunity for open and honest responses. While it was also assumed that participants have a clear understanding of student learning outcomes and the difference between formative and summative assessment, differences between survey and interview responses could reflect differences in how participants define the phrase student learning outcome.

Limitations due to the design of the survey should also be considered. The fact that some of the survey respondents chose not to answer all questions limited the researcher's ability to confirm correlations among some of the questions. The survey design only provided demographic information related to years of experience. It did not include questions regarding other demographics such as gender, age, or level of educational degree. Additionally, some of the interview participants also completed the anonymous survey which possibly contributed to redundancy in some of the responses.



## **Chapter IV**

### **Results**

#### *History of Researcher's Experience*

As an employee of the same North Carolina community college for almost twenty years, the researcher has been involved in two SACS reaccreditation reviews. Her first experience was as a faculty member under the SACS focus on institutional effectiveness, proven by answering a multitude of 'must' and 'should' statements that were most directly related to college inputs (college resources) rather than outcomes (student learning). Faculty and staff from all areas of the college participated on various committees, beginning their work about three years prior to the onsite visit of the committee that determined the college's accreditation status. An in-depth report of the college's institutional self-study was produced for the committee, prior to their visit. Weeks before the visit, the college took great pains to shore up, straighten up, and clean up the campus in preparation for the committee's visit. The college's accreditation was reaffirmed with some commendations and some responses to some recommendations . . . and college life returned to normal.

The researcher's second reaccreditation is still in process at the writing of this study. Her experience and her perception are very different this time as her role has changed and as the SACS reaccreditation process has changed. Her role at the college has changed as she is now a curriculum administrator, with no teaching responsibilities. The reaccreditation or reaffirmation process has changed as colleges are no longer seeking to respond to a multitude of 'must' and 'should' statements. The prescriptive criteria have been replaced with more

general principles. Instead of the entire college personnel producing one document for submission, the College administration writes the Compliance document, which is composed to demonstrate compliance with core requirements, comprehensive standards, and federal requirements. It is reviewed by an offsite team 15 months prior to an onsite visit by yet another team. The visiting team will further investigate any concerns the off-site team noted and will determine the acceptability of the college's Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP), which includes broad-based involvement of institutional constituencies in its development and proposed implementation. During this reaffirmation process, the researcher has written some of the narratives for the compliance document, provided documentation for many other pieces of the compliance narrative, and worked closely with committees and other leaders in the development of the QEP. For the last three years, she has worked with each of her departments in developing student learning outcomes for individual courses as well as program learning outcomes. Several iterations of the learning outcomes were developed before her division began developing appropriate, identifiable and measurable outcomes.

For the researcher and a few of her colleagues, the process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes has been labor-intensive, frustrating, and sometimes overwhelming. Through all the work and overwhelming times, the researcher and those of her colleagues (administrators and faculty alike) who have become immersed in the literature, who have attended several conferences and workshops on assessment and the development of learning outcomes, and who have spent a great deal of time discussing and debating the development and assessment of learning outcomes at the College now consider the process challenging, invigorating, and the right thing to do. However, the researcher has observed that many of her colleagues are not moving to the invigorating and challenging

stages of student learning outcomes development and assessment. They try to do what the College believes SACS is asking it to do, but they struggle with understanding what “SACS wants,” and they do not see any connection between documenting learning outcomes; assessing them; and indicating how the assessment results are used to improve learning; and what occurs in the classroom. In their eyes, the process consumes valuable time that could better be used working with students and is simply something that must be done in order to satisfy SACS.

This perceived disconnect between the requirements of SACS for reaffirmation of accreditation and what occurs in the learning environment was the impetus for this research. The purpose of this study was to determine community college instructors’ and administrators’ beliefs regarding the impact of the accreditation process that involves identifying and assessing student learning outcomes on teaching effectiveness and student learning. This chapter describes the qualitative findings of this research. There were two major questions that guided this inquiry: (1) Do curriculum administrators and faculty view regional accreditation as meaningful in the evaluation of and improvement of learning? (2) Do curriculum administrators and faculty believe regional accreditation is useful in promoting student and program success? Additionally, the study also investigated any differences in the beliefs about assessment and the use of student learning outcomes held by technical and general education faculty and administrators? As previously stated, both the interview questions and the survey questions, developed to answer the major questions guiding the inquiry, can be grouped into three major categories: those regarding beliefs about usefulness of the process; those regarding beliefs about departmental work with program

student learning outcomes; and those regarding beliefs about personal implementation of student learning outcomes.

### *Survey Results*

*Respondent characteristics.* While the online survey was designed to be completely anonymous regarding position and college, respondents were asked to provide their length of employment in the community college system. Of those responding, 52% have been employed in the community college system for at least twelve years. This means that many of these individuals were involved in at least one other SACS reaccreditation. Only 11% of those responding had less than five years in the system, suggesting that 89% of the respondents to have been involved in the entire reaccreditation process. While detail results for each of the first ten survey questions can be found in Appendix X, initially, the researcher focused on select survey and interview questions based on the three major categories.

### *Usefulness of the Process*

The majority of the respondents to the first two survey questions indicated that they believed that the development and assessment of student learning outcomes has a positive impact on both teaching and learning. Seventy-four percent of the respondents agreed that the work with student learning outcomes improved teaching, and eighty-three percent of the respondents agreed that it improved learning (see Table 1). This is supported by the responses to interview question #1 in which 8 of the 15 participants agreed that the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes promotes program improvement. While 8 of the 15 interview participants also believed that the SACS reaccreditation process as a whole had some positive impact on their college, survey respondents were less

convinced of this; only 64% of the respondents agreed that the process was useful for their students.

Table 1.

*Questions Addressing Beliefs about Usefulness of the Process*

Survey or interview question	Total number of respondents	% Respondents Who strongly agree or agree	% Respondents who strongly disagree or disagree	% Respondents who are neutral
Survey Q1. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes, (as defined by the SACS reaccreditation process), helps improve teaching at this college.	90	74	10	16
Survey Q2. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes helps improve student learning at this college.	90	83	7	10
Survey Q10. Now that the decennial SACS	90	64	12	23

reaccreditation process is complete, do you think this process was useful for your students?

*Use of Program Learning Outcomes*

When asked about how departments and programs were identifying and using student learning outcomes, 76% of the respondents agreed that their departments developed student learning outcomes and 70% of the respondents indicated that their departments also assessed student learning outcomes. Since 61% of the respondents indicated that their departments assessed program student learning outcomes prior to the SACS reaccreditation process, there is not a clear indication as to how much of an influence the reaccreditation process had on the respondents’ understanding of their department’s use of program student learning outcomes (See Table 2).

Table 2.

*Questions Addressing Program Student Learning Outcomes*

Survey or interview question	Total number of respondents	% of respondents who strongly agree or agree	% of respondents who strongly disagree or disagree	% of respondents who are neutral
Survey Q6. My department collectively develops student learning outcomes for our program.	90	76	12	12

Survey Q7. My department assesses program student learning outcomes.	90	70	13	17
Survey Q9. My department assessed program student learning outcomes prior to this reaccreditation.	88	61	17	22

*Individual Work with Learning Outcomes*

Survey questions 3, 4, 5, and 8 and interview question 4 address the respondents’ personal work with learning outcomes. While 95% of the respondents indicated that they understand what student learning outcomes are, 89% indicated that they develop learning outcomes for their courses, and 92% indicated that they assess them, it is not clear the degree to which the current reaccreditation process impacted this as 87% of the respondents also indicated that they assessed student learning outcomes prior to this accreditation (see Table 3). Even more significant is that of the twelve interview participants who still teach, only five indicated that this process had any impact on their teaching. The consensus was that they had always developed and assessed learning outcomes.

Table 3.

*Questions Addressing Individual Work with Student Learning Outcomes.*

Survey or interview question	Total number of respondents	% of respondents who strongly agree	% of respondents who strongly	% of respondents who are neutral
------------------------------	-----------------------------	-------------------------------------	-------------------------------	----------------------------------

		or agree	disagree or disagree	
Survey Q3. I understand what student learning outcomes are.	92	95	0	5
Survey Q4. I develop student learning outcomes for my courses.	89	89	3	8
Survey Q5. I assess student learning outcomes in my courses.	89	92	3	4
Survey Q8. I assessed student learning outcomes in my courses prior to this accreditation.	91	87	4	9

This surface look suggests that community college faculty and administrators at these five colleges believe that the development and assessment of student learning outcomes improves teaching and student learning; that the majority of departments develop and assess program learning outcomes; and that an even greater percentage of faculty develop and



assess student learning outcomes for their individual courses. However, there is no strong indication that the faculty and administrators see the reaccreditation process as having any great impact on what they have been doing all along.

### *Interview Responses*

*Transcript evaluation.* In order to better determine if and how the faculty at these colleges arrived at their suggested understanding and use of student learning outcomes, the researcher began a more in-depth investigation through several readings of the interview responses. During the first readings, the researcher looked for support for survey responses and experiences common to that of the researcher's many colleagues who struggle with understanding what "SACS wants" and who do not see any connection between documenting learning outcomes; assessing them; and indicating how the assessment results are used to improve learning; and what occurs in the classroom. Those same faculty and administrators believe that the process consumes valuable time and is simply something that must be done in order to satisfy SACS.

### *Development of Learning Outcomes*

College faculty and administrators define student learning outcomes in a variety of ways, and some struggle with articulating it. Five of the fifteen faculty and administrators interviewed defined student learning outcomes based on what students should be able to do, either at the end of a course, a program, or upon completion of a credential. The other ten participants described student learning outcomes in terms of what the student's major should be, preparation for the subsequent class in a program of study, preparation for a test, or the results of what students have learned. The responses were indicative of the same struggles the researcher and her colleagues had when they first began developing student learning

outcomes for their programs. Faculty know what they believe they need to teach, but have they determined that what they believe they need to teach is in fact what the students need to learn? This becomes clearer when the faculty are asked how they developed student learning outcomes. One indicated that faculty teaching the same subject met as a group, bringing their individual syllabi and course outlines with them. They began by looking for commonalities of student expectations among the syllabi. This information was used as a starting point for discussions guided by seeking to determine what they wanted the students to be able to do when they had completed the course. Another faculty member indicated that the first step was to find out from industry what the students needed to learn:

**Large College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** What do you need our students to be able to do when they graduate? If they start on the first day, once you've gotten them their email and stuff, what do they need to be able to do to be productive? Then we have been able to back that out. To do that, our capstone has to be this. In order to do the capstone, that means they have to have these skills, in order to have these skills, that means..... you know you just back it out.... You know your end-goal and you start putting together the building blocks. And so each class is a building block.

Other approaches included looking at industry standards, looking at what other colleges are doing, and reviewing graduate survey data. One teaching administrator summed it up more globally by saying:

**Medium-Sized College General Education Administrator (Teaching):**

Basically just sat down and said what do I want all the students to know once they have finished this course. I looked at it from two standpoints. One—what

do they need to know to go to the next level. Two-what do I want the students to know period, from the standpoint of general knowledge when they walk out of here. If they never take another college course, never transfer anywhere, what do I want them to take with them in life from this course, and then embedded those in the course itself, in the learning outcomes.

So when asked to define student learning outcomes, faculty and administrators had some difficulty; however, when they talked about developing them and began to think simply in terms of “what do my students need to know to be successful?,” most could articulate a process of logical inquiry.

#### *Indicators of Success Prior to Current Reaccreditation Process*

In comparing these processes that were described with what the colleges were doing before the impetus of developing and assessing student learning outcomes, the researcher asked two questions: What were you doing with student learning outcomes prior to your preparation for reaccreditation? How did you determine if your graduates had learned what they needed to learn to be successful? The responses to these questions reinforced the pre and post-effect of the reaccreditation process. In general, colleges may have had objectives listed in their syllabi. The assessments may or may not have matched the objectives, and they were determined, to a large degree, by the individual instructor. The measure of success was the grades students made rather than what they learned. One faculty member described her personal experience as follows:

#### **Medium –Sized College General Education Instructor with SACS**

**Leadership Role:** Well at the college, it was a more vague approach, what we called them was objectives, So you had learning objectives in every syllabus

and they were vague and not well constructed and the assessments were loosely connected to them so it seemed that people might be aware that they should be there, but there was no structure to make sure that they were there and all of that . . . In my class, I had your standard learning objectives, but I will admit, never had I been trained to word those properly so it was more like a laundry list of what I was going to cover.

The determination of whether or not graduates had learned what they needed to learn to be successful, prior to the reaccreditation process, was typically based on grades, program completion, graduate surveys, employer surveys, information from advisory boards, and the North Carolina Community College Performance Funding Measures (Appendix XI) annual report. While all of the faculty and administrators deemed this information as useful, those who had been more involved in the reaccreditation process spoke of the need for more specific information, more direct measures, and they supported the changes that had occurred as a result of their reaccreditation process. Many of them also stressed that programs such as those in the allied health field that had state licensing exams had far less work to do when it came to the use of learning outcomes.

#### *Defining Student Learning Outcomes*

The consensus was that those allied health programs had been developing and assessing student learning outcomes all along. The answers to all of these questions led the researcher to recognize that people are not necessarily talking about the same thing when they use the term student learning outcomes—there is not a defined understanding of what is meant by the phrase. The answers also supported the survey responses and those of the researcher's personal experience. Colleges were doing very little with learning outcomes

prior to reaccreditation, but in response to reaccreditation requirements, they were working to make some drastic changes in teaching or possibly working to document learning in ways they had not before -- all in a relatively short period of time. All of those changes impacted learning, but not all of them were clearly working with student learning outcomes. In the following selected portion of an interview, it was clear the instructor believed she taught her students what they needed to know, but she may have never defined that information as student learning outcomes.

**Researcher:** One of the requirements of SACS is the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes. How do you define them? What do they mean to you and your program?

**Medium-Sized College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** You mean how do I go about figuring out what they were? Well, they used to be called something else. Not outcomes, but . . .

**Researcher:** Competencies.

**Medium-Sized College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** Competencies - that was it. I had those competencies to build from . . . Everything I turned in passed muster. The wording was what changed. Instead of being a competency, it is an outcome now. . . You go in there and you take competency out and you put in outcome.

**Researcher:** That is the only difference?

**Medium-Sized College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** That is not the only thing that I did because I did look at them -- When I first came here is that first year that we were having this preparation, knowing that SACS was

coming and all that. And so, everything was really, really new to me, and I did not know myself what the competencies were at that time as far as what was written on paper. . .

**Researcher:** Do you think you already knew what students needed to know though?

**Medium-Sized College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** Oh yeah.

**Researcher:** And is that what those competencies or outcomes are?

**Medium-Sized College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** No. Not always. Because sometimes the state thinks students need to know one thing and that thing is outdated and I know that it is outdated because I was just in industry before I came here and so do I mention it? Yeah, because it is on the blurb, you know in the catalog. Do I labor over it? No. Does that make sense? . . . I know what they need – one, because I have been in this field since I was 18/19 years old. I got kind of a broad range of different kinds of industries. Different kinds of stuff that is used - concepts that they need to know. So I pretty much know what they need to know, and I try to make it a point to get into industry, here. I at least take tours of their facilities to see what types of equipment they are using, what types of software they are using, and stuff like that. Some of them, I have actually gone and worked for several days with the maintenance people so I can get more of an in-depth [exposure]. I know what they need and I give them what they need. I give them just enough of what the state says they got to have to satisfy those requirements and then I labor over what I know they need. . . Because when they go out of here they are on my

good name. People don't call the switchboard looking for maintenance people – they call me. . . . If I don't send out a quality product, they are not going to call me because they are not going to want to buy it from me anymore. So I will be kicking myself in the foot if I don't send them out prepared.

This instructor works to make sure her students learn what they need to learn, regardless of what it is called or how it is written down or what else is written down.

### *Purpose of Learning Outcomes*

When the researcher asked all of the interview subjects if they believed teaching or learning had been influenced by the process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes, only five of the individuals unequivocally thought teaching had been influenced. No one specifically spoke to any impact on learning. Two individuals indicated that they could not determine whether or not there had been any change, one indicated that it had forced her to look at what her college was indicating on paper that it was teaching, but that may or may not have impacted what or how she taught. Seven individuals were very certain that the process had had no impact on their teaching, either because they were already working with what they considered to be student learning outcomes (three individuals) or because they simply continued doing what they had always done (four individuals).

Therefore, there was no clear support for the development and assessment of student learning outcomes having any impact on teaching or learning. If there is no great impact on teaching or learning, one would question the purpose of establishing student learning outcomes. The fifteen interview subjects provided the following responses when asked the purpose of establishing student learning outcomes:

- *To make credentials worth something, students ought to be learning something and instructors ought to know if they have learned it or not*

- *To know if the instructor is doing his job or not, if doing well, then doing it for the students, if not doing well, then doing it for himself*
- *To be responsible for what instructors do*
- *To quantify something that is not really quantifiable (determine if teacher is doing a good job)*
- *To measure what is done. If an instructor keeps teaching and students go away with nothing, what good is that?*
- *To satisfy requirements*
- *To satisfy SACS requirements—and to make other instructors aware of what the focus should be*
- *To communicate what students learn with the public and employers*
- *To articulate what is being done*
- *To provide a good guideline for what should be taught*
- *To make sure that what instructors do reflects in what students learn*
- *To give the students the skills and knowledge the college intends to give them*
- *To determine if the instructors and college did what they said they would do*
- *To make sure that instructors and the college do what they said they would do so the student does not have to get a job to know his worth*
- *To help students obtain what they need to be successful, by identifying what is important and necessary*

This list of responses shows that most of the faculty and administrators believed that the purpose in establishing student learning outcomes is to make the institution and instructors accountable for doing what they have said they would do; to help institution and instructors communicate what they say they are going to do; and to help students be successful. It should also be noted, however, that two of the faculty stated that the process was simply an exercise to satisfy requirements—neither faculty connected the establishment of learning outcomes with what they did in their classrooms, labs, or shops.

#### *Assessment and Use of Results*

Since accountability was an implied component of the purpose of establishing learning outcomes as described by nine of the interview participants, it is important to know how they assess the outcomes and then what they do with those assessment results.



Participants were first asked if they used student learning outcomes and if they did, to provide an example of one. Some individuals could articulate clearly stated student learning outcomes that are measurable:

**Researcher:** so instead of understanding a business letter, what would the learning outcome be?

**Large College General Education Administrator (Teaching) with SACS**

**Leadership Role:** probably something like...create business letters in appropriate format. It is something they can do and you can look at it and measure it and say did you do that?

However, others found it difficult to easily state, even though it seemed that they did establish learning outcomes for the students:

**Researcher:** Could you give me an example of one that you all have?

**Large College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** Like the class that I teach the most, they have to be able to...it's a digital electronics class, they have to be able to change numbers back and forth between the different numbering systems in order to be successful in any of the courses. They have to be able to understand the basic logic grades, they have to be able to understand circuits, they have to be able to not only look at a circuit and tell you what the equations are, be able to work with the equations....if I give you these inputs, tell me what the outputs are, they have to be able to build that in reality and make it work. Take some chips, take some wires, wire it up and it better be able to do what you said it would do or if it doesn't, you need to be able to take the test equipment and figure out where it went wrong. If they can do all

that (and we also do all that on the computer as well), if they can do all that, that class is like kindergarten...you are just learning your ABC's and your colors-not doing anything fancy, but you need to know your numbering system to do math, right? So that is how I view that class—we are learning our ABC's. Then when they get to the next class, they had better be able to wire and to do it easily and quickly. They had better be able to convert numbering systems or they're just going to fail the next class.

While another instructor indicated that he did not use student learning outcomes, his statements indicate that he is cognizant of what his students are learning or what they are finding difficult. More importantly, when asked what he did with his assessment results (even those that are informally stated), he talked about using them to modify instruction:

**Researcher:** As an instructor do you use student learning outcomes in your courses? Maybe you have a different name for it – maybe you call them competencies.

**Medium-Sized College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** I would have to say – not really. I mean I believe the ideas are always in the back of my mind as to whether or not a student is proficient in the work that I am trying to train them to do. I always have that in the back of my mind and when I see that they are not proficient in an area we may go back. We do recap, revisit - you know a variety of ways of trying to address [them]. Some days you have students come in to your class and the whole group is just zoned out – you know they are just not ready to learn. And so you – I mean me as an instructor – I give them a certain quality of information. Like this year what is

giving my students a problem did not affect them at all last year. The areas they are weak in this year did not affect them at all last year. So it's always a balance and as far as measuring the exact line by line item in the SACS stuff that has very little, to no impact there – in my classroom.

**Researcher:** Now you did just answer this – the question I was going to ask you was how you assess student learning outcomes. You just mentioned to me that you were paying attention to that all the time – because you compared the classes year to year. Let's say – this class has problems that last year's group didn't - what do you do with that information?

**Medium-Sized College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** . . . but if it is an area like for example you come up on a test or in a lab where you have to do the assignment, and they are unable to do it - well then I try to like take tests and evaluate where did most of the bulk of the class miss it. What is the area? Then, we've got to reserve as instructors – we've got to reserve enough time somehow to go back and focus on these areas.

Only four of the participants indicated that assessment was solely used for the purpose of evaluating students and giving them a grade. The other eleven instructors and administrators discussed the importance of assessing how well the teachers did; using the assessment results to determine if and how they should modify instruction; and always working to help students be more successful. Some of these individuals indicated that there is still work to be done, but that they were already much more aware of what they were doing in their classes and what their students were learning as a result of this process:

**Researcher:** You just answered how you assess it [student learning outcome].  
Tell me what you do with those assessment results.

**Medium-Sized College General Education Instructor with SACS**

**Leadership Role:** What I do is, I look at them, actually it's interesting because this sort of happens at the program evaluation level what I am about to talk about—that is when I look at them. We report on the major program outcomes which come from our course learning outcomes (for psychology folks) and we get together with each other (there are three of us) and we have to report overall percentages and overall grades—we do have the writing one as a program one. So we have to talk about--OK, how many of our students attained a score of at least this on one writing assignment or whatever and it's based on the rubric..... Over time I have found I have some week spots where my students are consistently meeting the writing one—I am obsessed with that, but over here, they're not getting it. So I ask myself how am I covering this? What are we doing here? Maybe I am rushing through this, maybe I am not putting the emphasis on it that I should. It is interesting, when you are with the other folks talking about it because our areas are different and we uncover biases... Maybe areas we never liked as students....and I am thinking, Oh my gosh, I am doing my students a disservice and I never knew. So the only way you can know is to have data and to look at it. So then we go back and we say OK.... and we have a column that we have to write here is what we are going to do about this...and we do it individually and we do it collectively...and we do try to do this...but I do not want to pretend that it is

that perfect, though because there are times and areas where people are not doing that, I am sure. And there are times when you make plans and you don't carry them out, too.

These statements suggested that not only do many of the instructors and administrators see accountability as an implied component of the purpose of establishing student learning outcomes, but most of them were also using assessment of the outcomes to refine or alter what they were doing with their students in an effort to improve student learning. It is also clear that many folks do this as a part of good instruction and not as a result of the reaccreditation process. Some of them still saw the process as an exercise in submitting the correct documentation, regardless of what was happening in the classroom:

**Researcher:** What do you do with those assessment results?

**Small College General Education Administrator (Teaching):** We took all of those results and of course we made our nice little report and said yes we met this one or no we didn't and based on whether or not we met that objective, you know we had to go back in and figure out why we did not meet the objective and make some changes or if we did meet, then how can we also use that in other courses.

**Researcher:** Has this process of identifying learning outcomes had any other impact, positive or negative?

**Small College General Education Administrator (Teaching):** Well, by nature of creating outcomes and assessment, 95% of this fell on faculty to do the evaluation and the assessment so from the faculty standpoint, there was definitely an increased work load to evaluate this. From a student standpoint,

it did not increase the workload on the student; we did try to use things that were already in place as far as exams and those type things so I'm not sure that we saw any difference from the student's point of view.

This dialogue suggests that there is an overriding awareness of reports that need to be produced and additional work that must be done by the faculty--additional paperwork that did not have any noticeable impact on student activity.

### *Responses Based on Groupings*

In an effort to determine if an individual's educational environment had any impact on the participant's use or understanding of student learning outcomes or his assessment of student learning outcomes, responses were organized into categories that reflected college position (administrator / instructor) or instructional area (general education versus vocational/technical programs). The responses were also grouped according to participants' colleges. As noted in the tables below, the participants' colleges did not indicate any consistency in responses; however, involvement in SACS leadership was a strong indicator of learning outcome use, student learning outcome development and assessment influence on teaching, and use of assessment for instructional improvement.

Table four provides the responses from administrative participants. The alternating shading indicates participants from different colleges. Of the seven administrators in the interview pool, four indicated that the process that their college has undergone for reaccreditation has influenced teaching (either their own or that of their faculty), three indicated that it had not. The four administrators who were still actively teaching indicated that they did use student learning outcomes, and six of the participating administrators

indicated that they or their faculty use assessment to improve instruction, while the one other administrator spoke of assessment being used primarily for student evaluation.

Table 4.

*Interview Responses of Administrators.*

Duties	Gen. ed.	Voc/tech	College size	Campus leader in SACS	Process influenced teaching	Use student learning outcomes	Assessment for Improvement
Admin and teach	X		Large	X	Yes	Yes	Yes
Admin		X	Large	X	No	----	Yes
Admin		X	Ave	X	Yes	----	Yes
Admin and teach		X	Small		No	Yes	Not certain
Admin and teach	X		Small		Yes	Yes (not specifically Articulated)	Yes
Admin and teach	X		Ave	X	No	Yes	Yes
Admin			Ave	X	Yes	----	Yes

*Note.* Campus Leader in SACS had a leadership role in the college's reaccreditation process. Gen. Ed. = General Education; Voc/Tech. = Vocational / Technical; Admin = Administrator.

Table five represents the responses provided by the faculty participants. Three of the eight faculty participants indicated that their teaching had been influenced by the reaccreditation process. Four of the faculty indicated that they used student learning outcomes, and they specifically articulated examples of them. Three other participants described what they looked for in students' work, and their ideas could have been formulated into student learning outcomes even though these faculty did not refer to them in that language. One participant was very adamant in stating that he did not use student learning outcomes. A comparison of faculty use of assessment results shows three of the faculty responding that they used assessment for improvement of instruction; one participant mentioned some limited focus on improvement, and four of the eight described assessment as solely for student evaluation.

Table 5.

*Interview Responses of Faculty.*

Gen ed.	Voc / tech	College size	Campus leader in SACS	Process influenced teaching	Use student learning outcomes	Assessment for improvement
	X	Large		No	Yes (not specifically articulated)	No
	X	Large		Not Sure	Yes (not specifically articulated)	No
X		Large		No	Yes	Yes



X	Ave		Yes	Yes (not specifically articulated)	No
X	Ave		No	No	Possibly
X	Ave		No	Yes	No
X	Ave	X	Yes	Yes	Yes
X	Ave	X	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Note.* Campus Leader in SACS had a leadership role in the college’s reaccreditation process. Gen. Ed. = General Education; Voc/Tech. = Vocational / Technical.

Table six presents the responses of the participants who work with general education courses or programs. Of these seven participants, four of them indicated that the reaccreditation process had influenced their teaching while three believed there was no change in their teaching since they had been practicing the same strategies as encouraged by the establishment and assessment of student learning outcomes. All seven individuals indicated they used student learning outcomes, with only one struggling to articulate specific ones. Just as importantly, six of the seven participants indicated that they used assessment to make instructional improvements as well as to evaluate students.

Table 6.

*Interview Responses of General Education Participants.*

Duties	College size	Campus leader in SACS	Process influenced teaching	Use student learning outcomes	Assessment for improvement
Admin and teach	Large	X	Yes	Yes	Yes
Faculty	Large		No	Yes	Yes
Faculty	Medium		No	Yes	No

Admin and teach	Small		Yes	Yes (not specifically articulated)	Yes
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Faculty	Medium	X	Yes	Yes	Yes
Admin and teach	Medium	X	No	Yes	Yes
Faculty	Medium	X	Yes	Yes	Yes

*Note.* Campus Leader in SACS had a leadership role in the college’s reaccreditation process. Admin = Administrator.

Finally, table seven indicates the responses of vocational/technical faculty and administrators. These responses are very different from those of the general education faculty and administrators. When asked if the reaccreditation process had impacted teaching, only one administrator and one faculty member believed that to be the case. Three of the other individuals believed there had been no impact, with one participant uncertain. Only one of the five participants still in the vocational/technical classroom indicated that he used student learning outcomes and also clearly articulated an example. Three other participants indicated that they used them, but did not specifically articulate an example. Of the seven vocational/technical participants, only two spoke of assessment being important for improving instruction. Three indicated assessment was solely for student evaluation and the other two individuals were not entirely clear in their response.

Table 7.

*Interview Responses of Vocational / Technical Participants.*

Duties	College	Campus	Process	Use student	Assessment for
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	size	leader in SACS	influenced teaching	learning outcomes	improvement
Faculty	Large		No	Yes (not specifically articulated)	No
Admin	Large	X	No	----	Yes
Faculty	Large		Not Sure	Yes (not specifically articulated)	No
Faculty	Medium		Yes	Yes (not specifically articulated)	No
Faculty	Medium		No	No	Possibly
Admin	Medium	X	Yes	----	Yes
Admin	Small		No	Yes	Not certain

and  
teach

*Note.* Campus Leader in SACS had a leadership role in the college’s reaccreditation process. Admin = Administrator.

### *Summary*

This inquiry was designed to identify community college administrator and faculty beliefs regarding the effectiveness of the development and assessment of student learning outcomes. In particular, the study was focused on how the participants viewed learning outcomes assessment in light of their college’s reaccreditation process.

The majority of both the survey respondents and interview participants indicated that they believed that the development and assessment of student learning outcomes has a positive impact on teaching and learning. However, there was less support of the idea that the

whole process was useful for their students. While a majority of respondents also indicated that their departments and programs develop and assess student learning outcomes, since a large percentage of respondents indicated that the use of student learning outcomes and their assessment had been practiced at the college even prior to the reaccreditation process, there is no clear indication of what impact the reaccreditation process had on program assessment and evaluation. An even larger percentage of respondents indicated that they develop and assess learning outcomes for their courses, but there is still no clear support for reaccreditation having any impact on this as many indicated that they did this prior to reaccreditation, as well.

While the initial response suggests faculty and administrators were comfortable with the development and use of student learning outcomes, descriptions of the outcomes indicated that the phrase “student learning outcome” has different meanings. It was also clear from conversations with the faculty and administrators that people still struggle with articulating specific outcomes for programs or for courses. Significantly, while a large percentage of survey respondents indicated that the use of student learning outcomes and their assessment had been practiced at the college even prior to the reaccreditation process, the interview responses suggested that colleges may not have been that immersed in learning outcome development and assessment. The interview participants indicated that, in reality, colleges were doing very little with learning outcomes prior to reaccreditation. However, in response to reaccreditation requirements, they were working to make some drastic changes in teaching or possibly working to document learning in ways they had not before -- all in a relatively short period of time. All of those changes were believed to impact learning, but not all of them were clearly working with student learning outcomes. Along with helping

students to be successful, most of the faculty and administrators indicated that the purpose in establishing student learning outcomes is to make the institution and instructors accountable for doing what they have said they would do and to help institution and instructors communicate what they say they are going to do. It is also important to note that a few faculty indicated that the process was simply to satisfy requirements.

One of the goals of this study was to determine if participants' 'educational environment' had any impact on their beliefs about the effectiveness of using student learning outcomes. 'educational environment' included college size, duties at the college, involvement in SACS leadership roles, or area of instruction. The participants' colleges did not support any consistency in responses. However, working with general education programs and courses as well as involvement in SACS leadership appeared to be correlated with a participant's development and use of learning outcomes, with a participant's realization that the reaccreditation process has influenced his teaching, and with a participant's use of assessment for instructional improvement.

## **Chapter V**

### **Discussion**

The present study examined community college administrator and faculty beliefs regarding the accreditation process that involves identifying and assessing student learning outcomes and its impact on teaching effectiveness and student learning. This chapter includes a discussion of the results and implications of the study. Three major themes emerged from evaluation of the interview and survey data: a disconnect between an instructor's focus on individual student learning and his or her understanding of learning outcome assessment plans that are focused on continuous overall program assessment; the difference in learning outcome use between vocational/technical faculty and those faculty who teach general education courses; and the frustration with the amount of time expended on implementing outcome assessment along with vague and ambiguous directives from SACS.

#### *Emergent Themes*

*Disconnect between an instructor's focus on individual student learning and his or her focus on program assessment.* The data showed that 74% of the survey respondents agreed that developing and assessing outcomes improved teaching at their college and 83% agreed that it improved learning. This would suggest that these colleges are very involved in learning outcomes assessment and that the faculty develop student learning outcomes and routinely assess them. However, interviews with faculty and administrators called this into question. Interview participants were asked to define student learning outcomes. They defined them in several different ways, ranging from defining what a student's major should

be to describing what a student should be able to do once he or she has completed a course or program. Some also struggled with providing a particular example of a learning outcome for their discipline or program.

The varied interpretations of learning outcomes suggested that not all faculty and administrators had a clear understanding of what student learning outcomes are. Some comfortably used the outcomes assessment jargon and some did not. However, limited jargon use did not mean instructors did not know what their students needed to learn. The instructors clearly saw their students as their mission. When they talked about learning outcomes, they did not talk about program assessment; they described learning and evaluation of their students. This was particularly true for the vocational/technical instructors. They knew that either their students learned what they needed to learn to get jobs or they did not. The instructors helped their students learn and then evaluated what they had learned -- and it was just that simple. This is emphasized in the following comments of a vocational instructor from a medium-sized college:

Part of my approach, because I came from private business - you don't spend a lot of time on a bunch of hoo-ha that serves no purpose -- does that make sense? All those wordings and formats and things that don't get anything done -- you don't do. You make you a list -- they've got to know this, they've got to know this, they've got to know this. How are we going to know they know this? Part A - we are going to make them do this. If they can do that, then they know this. If it works they pass, if it doesn't they fail. There is no 75, it is either there or it's not. Either you are making widgets or you're not -- that is the bottom line. And that is how I grade on my final test -- you either

make that motor run, or it doesn't. And you are back with me next semester, and we will hold hands next semester or whatever.

*The difference in learning outcome use between vocational/technical faculty and those faculty who teach general education courses.*

As noted from the above response, this vocational/technical instructor did not see a specific use for the additional documentation of outcomes. Similar comments were shared by other vocational/technical instructors. Therefore, this study also attempted to document whether or not there were any discipline differences regarding the effectiveness of using student learning outcomes. In general, all faculty were initially confused about how to assess program outcomes. Community college faculty interaction with students, at any given time, is most often directly tied to specific courses. The frustration of looking at outcomes more globally and assessing them appropriately is exemplified in the comments of one of the general education administrators who was still in the classroom every semester:

**Medium-Sized College General Education Administrator:** ...we were doing the embedded in the final exams, and we were told that was not acceptable -- that you could not use a final exam to assess an outcome. So we asked, what do we do? They answered well you have got to come up with a way to determine if that student has learned all those outcomes when he graduates. That is kind of impractical...in relationship to how you are going to translate that down to what is going on in each class because a very small percentage of our students graduate --they transfer . . . the irritating part was that I talked with other schools who had just, within a matter of months, been through the same process and were doing the same thing and they said



[SACS] told us it was wonderful. Embedding learning outcomes in courses is exactly what we should be doing. So there was no way that we knew what we were doing was bad or good based on what other people were doing...

Initial frustration aside, the interview responses suggested that working with general education programs and courses was a strong indicator of learning outcome use and development, outcome assessment influences on teaching, and the use of assessment for instructional improvement. Conversely, vocational/technical faculty and administrators, in general, indicated less connection and use of learning outcomes with what occurred in their classrooms, laboratories, and shops. As previously stated, this result does not imply that vocational/technical faculty and administrators were not interested in their students' learning. They absolutely believed it was important to know what their students needed to know and what they did know. However, since many of them were much less familiar with the education jargon; they did not articulate their ideas about student learning outcomes and the use of these as readily as some of the general education faculty and administrators. Their more practical, very program specific approach to their students' learning resulted in a clear distinction between their limited work with and use of documented learning outcomes and that of the general education faculty. However, it is important to note that a few of the vocational/technical faculty believed that, with the exception of the additional paperwork, outcomes assessment was easier for them than for general education instructors. This is evident in the following conversation with a vocational/technical instructor at one of the large colleges.

**Researcher:** I am going to ask you a different question – because you said something earlier – other folks had problems with the student learning

outcomes and you guys didn't.....do you think the process influenced the teaching of other faculty?

**Large College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** I don't know – I think some of the other faculty were doing their jobs – the thought of the whole thing was, I am doing it but how am I going to determine the student outcomes? Where I never had any problem with that. I have always determined by the projects they have done – the work they have done – they have done this, they have done that.....like I said I couldn't speak for other instructors. But you know, I would think, if you were an English teacher, how would you determine the outcomes? What do you get to show for it – you have tests – you have to break the sentence down – tell me what a noun is, what a pronoun is – O.K., but can you use them in a sentence? OK, you wrote it down in a sentence – I gave you a test. How about three days later? I give you the same test, can you pass that test? What I taught my students in August they can do twice as good in June. So I can see a steady – it's like a house, like a foundation – some of them come in just as green, and some with a little experience. You can tell just with time they get more comfortable and they start doing setups. You can watch them out there doing different things. But their outcome again is their projects.

**Researcher:** You were talking about the English instructor, and I know that you just used that as an example....

**Large College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** Just in general – yeah.

**Researcher:** You said that maybe they would sort of have had a question [about developing learning outcomes]

**Large College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** They might have. I would think a younger English teacher might have had some problems with it – but we had some here that have probably been through SACS once before. I am assuming the younger ones would say, how am I going to define this? How do I...What do I show for an outcome? They write a research paper – to me and this is my personal opinion.....and that outcome is. . . When they are out of here tomorrow, where are they working? Did I give them enough information? We have a lot of students that don't even finish sometimes – I say a lot – I am talking a lot through my years of being here. . . They don't finish the program because they get jobs. They leave and they walk out of here and make \$15.00 an hour. And never get their Associate Degree. Ultimately I think that is why they are here . . . But I have also noticed another thing – as they get older, I get them coming back. I have noticed that – I got two at night that were never in my class, but to get promotions their boss says they have to get a degree. I have this one guy who has been at the company for 20 years, and they would not promote him because he did not have a degree. He needs a piece of paper. That is all they wanted. So I guess that is an outcome. If you look at it that way – how you show student outcomes. Well, if you take all your English and all your math and you get 90's and 95's and you ace the thing and you quit school what is your outcome? . . .

When this instructor was asked to give an example of a student learning outcome, he pointed to something one of his students had made (widget). That was his documentation. A more detailed description of the processes his students had to go through to make a widget included each student maintaining a daily journal of blueprints, activities, and standard operating procedures. This instructor did not include any of this when he described student learning outcomes or discussed the paperwork associated with learning outcome documentation and assessment. In fact, he admitted that his supervisor helped him substantially with the paperwork involved in developing the learning outcomes, but he never wavered from his understanding of what his students needed to know.

*Frustration with the amount of time expended on implementing outcome assessment along with vague and ambiguous directives from SACS.*

During the interviews, most of the faculty and administrators indicated that developing learning outcomes involved completing additional paperwork to submit to the administration, as required by SACS. This is noted in the following comments from two instructors and one administrator:

**Medium-Sized College Vocational/Technical Instructor:** And in conclusion though, about SACS, I am sure there is a lot of interest in how instructors do things. I would like to summarize by saying this right here, in general. What community colleges need to do for faculty is support their faculty. But you are not going to support our faculty and help the learning environment of these kids through creating just endless amounts paperwork it may take to do – o.k.? You want to keep it short and simple.

**Large College Vocational/Technical Administrator:** In the world today, in community college, there tend to be more and more things to do—the tasks keep getting added on. It tumbles down from administrators, to department heads, to individual faculty. We have got to do more with less—budget constraints. It is to the point that everyone –faculty, department heads, and me to my VP -- [everyone is saying,] “I can’t do anymore, and here you want me to assess something else.” So they see it possibly as another task.

**Medium-Sized College General Education Instructor:** Well the only difference – the only difference that I can see . . . is we did have to revise our way of doing the syllabi and, you know, our critical learning outcomes. In general for the liberal arts area, then putting on a specific learning outcome in humanities - which is what I teach--and spelling it out. There may be some way in which spelling out the learning outcomes has helped to be more specific, but honestly I was doing it anyway. . . . I have been talking to some of my colleagues up in my department, some of us who knew you were going to call.....and no one I talked to can tell any difference - we are just going about our merry way as usual - you know. . . .Other than the fact, again, I think people get irritated about the amount of time it takes to do this...

While faculty and administrators from both general education and vocational/technical disciplines indicated frustration with the additional paperwork, they all referenced the additional work in the past tense, as if they were referring to a particular event rather than an ongoing process. Further clarification is necessary to determine if the faculty and administrators were most frustrated by the reaccreditation process as a whole or by outcomes

assessment, or if in fact learning outcomes assessment has even become a college-wide ongoing practice at each of the colleges. The fact that many of the faculty described assessment results as being used solely for the purpose of student evaluation implied limited campus-wide use of assessment data for program improvement.

The survey responses suggested that outcomes assessment was campus wide, that the colleges all had active assessment plans in place prior to their self-studies, and that they did not initiate the practice in response to SACS reaccreditation. However, the interview responses indicated something different. Faculty and administrators alike shared that either their colleges were not assessing learning outcomes prior to their self-study for reaccreditation, or they were assessing learning outcomes, but just not documenting what they were doing.

In light of these responses, it is possible that the colleges may have been working so diligently to document outcomes and their assessment for SACS that faculty were just overwhelmed with the amount of work required in such a short period of time. As she described the initial development of learning outcomes at her college, a vocational/technical administrator from a medium-sized college laughingly described how she and her vice president wrote their learning outcomes in the car on the way to a conference. Added to the amount of work and sense of urgency was a frustration with the ambiguous direction and guidance colleges received from SACS in terms of how to develop a college-wide learning outcomes assessment plan from the ground up. This is evident in the following interview excerpt:

**Medium-Sized College General Education Instructor with SACS**

**Leadership Role:** So what we are going to do is...well if you have a problem

with ambiguity, you would have a problem with this process when they (SACS) started out. They knew what they had to do, but they did not know what to do. They knew the outcome, but they did not know how they were going to reach it. Well, if they knew the outcome, but didn't know how to reach it, and they were telling us....what do you think about us...well we had no idea how to reach it—no idea...so I think in looking back, if someone asked me about doing this again...and I did not have a gun to shoot myself, I would say give me the 435 MUST statements and by golly, I will get it done.

### *Summary*

The interview and survey responses indicated that faculty and administrators did believe that the development and assessment of student learning outcomes positively impacted learning. Some faculty believed that they had always done this and the current process is just documentation of what they had always done. Some believed it was a good thing because it caused people to look at what they were doing and to talk more about learning. They saw that the process they had undergone at their college during preparation for reaccreditation had either directly or indirectly resulted in some effective educational innovations. However, even among the faculty and administrators who believed learning outcomes assessment had positively impacted learning either directly or indirectly, no one indicated that the impact on learning was comparable to the amount of additional work. Even more significant was that no one provided a specific example of how assessment results had been used for making program changes indicating the impact those changes had on program success. While some individuals did describe what they learned from assessment results, they did not specifically address modifications made in light of the assessment results nor the

impact of any modifications. It is also important to point out that while most that faculty did believe that the development and assessment of student learning outcomes positively impacted learning, unfortunately some faculty believed that the whole process was just an exercise to satisfy SACS requirements that goes away when SACS goes away (not to return for ten years). They implied that this was the typical response of colleges to the decennial reaffirmation of accreditation experience, and they would not be easily convinced that the current process had changed colleges' responses. It is also important to note, when examining faculty and administrator comments regarding student learning outcomes, that some individuals were comfortable with the assessment jargon, either because of their leadership role in their college's reaffirmation process and the required professional development that occurred as a result of that leadership role or because of the more academic rather than practical nature of their discipline. However, other individuals did not connect the jargon with how they assessed learning.

Significantly, those individuals who had leadership roles in their college's reaffirmation process did not simply see learning outcomes assessment as just a good thing that was the impetus for effective educational innovations. They saw outcomes assessment as providing useful data that would be used to improve learning. Even these individuals, though, were frustrated by the amount of time that preparing for reaccreditation consumed. They shared that vague and ambiguous directives from SACS decreased their efficiency in understanding and implementing learning outcomes assessment. Some suggested that the decennial review added to the time and made it seem more of a policing by SACS rather than an opportunity for self-study. Not only did they believe in the effectiveness of outcomes assessment, but they also suggested that in a perfect world, colleges should be SACS-ready



every day, eliminating the need for a scheduled review and reaffirmation process. This ‘buy in’ is necessary for outcomes assessment to move from innovation to institutionalization. Faculty must assume leadership in the development, implementation and use of the college assessment plan (Hadden and Davies, 2002).

### *Implications for the Future*

As noted in this quote from an instructor who had a leadership role in the reaccreditation process, in terms of describing the process and understanding what learning outcomes are, faculty and administrators need more guidance in understanding what SACS reaccreditation expectations are and in determining how best to meet those expectations in light of the college’s mission.

#### **Medium-Sized College General Education Instructor with SACS**

**Leadership Role:** I think the general process does [promote program improvement]. Not sure if the process as defined by SACS does. The reason that I think that is because I am not sure if people understand what they are doing when they are formulating learning outcomes, and I also don’t think that the way the process is engineered, that people have accountability as far as assessment of those outcomes or even formulating quality learning outcomes to begin with. I think the emphasis is just placed on doing it so it feels like a check- the-box mentality. There’s not even enough support coming from SACS as far as training goes. I say that -- when I go to these conferences, I guess I’ve been three years in a row now. I go to sessions that are meant to emphasize the mission of SACS and what they are trying to get across or whatever, and I have been to a couple where there were some

models presented that were not good. They were not appropriate; they were not adequate as far as formulating learning outcomes and assessing those. So you know, of course, there is the disclaimer always that, well you know these are just some ideas and all that, but if we are going to be serious about this, we really need to be careful about the guidance we are giving people because you find out that there are people who have the work in front of them to put these learning outcomes together and make sure they are assessed, and to go from the data to work toward improvement and all that, and they have not had training in education. They are subject experts. You have got to take those steps, if that is really the message you are sending across, you need to support that, you need to support the people, take a more helpful kind of approach to it and a more detailed approach, not just – we are looking for the presence of these, but we are looking for quality in these and evidence that you are taking the data and you are actually using it to improve these students' experiences because that is our goal, that is our commitment, that is our responsibility. So there ya go!

As indicated in the comments above, the perception is that more training and guidance needs to take place at two levels if the expected positive impact of student learning outcomes assessment is to be realized. First, SACS must provide more defined guidance to colleges and their leadership. In its effort to avoid being too prescriptive and therefore disrupting the multiplicity and autonomy of higher education institutions, it is perceived by those same institutions as providing vague and ambiguous directives. Secondly, limited time, limited guidance, and possibly limited resources seemed to have resulted in limited training of

faculty and administrators. The impact of training on “buy in” is seen in the individuals who had some leadership role in SACS, whether it be working with the compliance document or the QEP. They more clearly articulated the definition of student learning outcomes, examples of student learning outcomes, and the significance of assessment in program improvement. They also showed a greater appreciation for the process and what was being accomplished by it. As they talked, their leadership role had caused them to develop an understanding of learning outcome development and assessment, through reading the literature as well as attending workshops and conferences.

It is important to provide faculty and administrators at community colleges assistance in the development and institutionalization of assessment plans. For faculty to assume leadership in outcome assessment, they must have adequate training in development and assessment of learning outcomes and the use of the assessment data. They also must have resource support for the collection and analysis of the data. Planning should involve all stakeholders (all of the college community), allow sufficient time for development, and have a clearly stated purpose that involves goals that people value and that is designed to promote change (Banta et. al. 2004).

Hadden and Davies (2002) described the importance of developing a culture of assessment in order to sustain it. College leaders must allow student learning and assessment to figure prominently in campus conversations and must take an active role in those conversations. This may not occur simply as a result of the activities performed for reaccreditation. Faculty and administrators alike need time to learn about, discuss, and ‘play with’ assessment in a low-risk environment. This should be followed by a period of time for development, acceptance, and implementation of an assessment plan. Even if colleges begin

focusing on student learning outcomes three years prior to their reaccreditation date, which was a typical schedule noted by interview participants, the faculty and administrators have very little time to learn about outcome assessment, develop and implement a plan, and have data available for a review team. One administrator at the researcher's college shared that he had been so busy preparing for SACS, he had not had time to really think about and discuss student learning and that bothered him.

The previous statement about preparing for SACS exemplifies one of the other concerns with the process. The findings of an accrediting review committee are not viewed as being used by an agency to address areas of identified weaknesses, as SACS's President Wheelan suggested. Unfortunately, the whole process is viewed through a threatened perspective. This is clearly stated by one of the general education administrators at one of the large colleges:

I wish that there weren't such a disconnect with SACS. I think the new process is trying to get us to be better schools and give students better experiences, but there is always going to be that perception that it is the police coming. I just don't think of it that way. If you are doing the right thing, they are giving you guidelines for what the right thing is, you should say well whenever you want to drop by, we are here. And you wouldn't have to ramp up or do anything. You would just be ready. I am just such an optimist, but as a realist, I know that is not typically how it happens.

Rather than being viewed as disconnected from the mission of a college, Beno (2004) stressed that accreditation signifies something regarding institutional quality:

Accreditation, by design evaluates institutional quality. Institutional quality is determined by how well an institution fulfills its purposes. From the perspective of accrediting agencies, producing learning is one of the core purposes of an institution of higher education. In assessing institutional quality, accreditors are evaluating the student learning produced by the institution in the context of the institution's own mission, its stated learning objectives, and its identified means of assessing student learning. The challenge to community colleges is to identify the expected student learning outcomes for their own institution in the context of mission and the institution's own curriculum and to develop means of assessing that learning (p. 65).

If this is true, those individuals, whose outcomes are students getting jobs, must be convinced that outcome assessment is something useful, involves continual improvement, and can and should be a part of their teaching and learning process. They must be convinced that learning outcomes that are not directly linked to employment still involve skills that make students more employable.

The federal government has indicated concern with the current accreditation process. Member institutions who believe in the need for regional agencies should become more actively involved in determining how their accrediting agency supports and guides them, as well as how their agency assesses them. Colleges view their accrediting agencies as gatekeepers and even though accrediting visiting teams are composed of higher education faculty and administrators from similar institutions, colleges often view their relationship with their regional accrediting agency as antagonistic, not synergistic. While the interview

and survey participants indicated that they believed that assessment of learning outcomes positively impacted learning, they were less satisfied with the reaccreditation process as a whole. A regional accrediting commission must work harder to be, as President Wheelan (2006) described, “. . . a unique, decentralized system of people driving others toward intellectual, social, and cultural improvement.”

## Appendix I

### Email To Chief Academic Officers

Dear {College Chief Academic Officer}:

My name is Lisa Chapman. I am a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For my dissertation, I am investigating North Carolina community college faculty and administrators' beliefs regarding the impact of the regional accreditation process. The study seeks to answer the following questions:

1. Do faculty believe regional accreditation is useful in promoting student and program success?
2. Do curriculum administrators view regional accreditation as meaningful in the evaluation of and improvement of learning?
3. Are there differences in the beliefs about assessment and the use of student learning outcomes held by technical and general education faculty and administrators?

National attention has been directed at the effectiveness of higher education and its reaccreditation process. Since it is suggested that support for instructional strategies and practices is most significant when the support is accompanied by collective faculty and administration buy-in, My advisor, Dr. Barbara Day, and I are interested in evaluating practitioners' beliefs regarding the effectiveness of our current accreditation process. We are specifically interested in beliefs regarding the emphasis on assessment of student learning outcomes. Therefore, we are conducting a research study focused on how curriculum administrators and faculty, who have recently completed a self study under the current SACS reaccreditation process, view the effectiveness or potential effectiveness of learning outcome assessment. Faculty and administrators from your college were selected as possible participants in this study based on your college's reaccreditation date. A total of 5 North Carolina community colleges have been chosen to participate in this study.

One of the research tools we are using is an online survey (please see attached). We would like for your curriculum faculty and administrators to take a few minutes to complete the survey. To that end, I would appreciate it if you could forward this e-mail to all of your curriculum faculty and administrators so that they are aware of the survey and how to access it. The survey will be available for the next two weeks. Your assistance in communicating this information to your faculty and administration is greatly appreciated.

Sincerely,  
Lisa M. Chapman

Dear Faculty and Administrators,

My name is Lisa Chapman. I am a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For my dissertation, I am investigating North Carolina community college faculty and administrators' beliefs regarding the impact of the regional accreditation process. If you have 20 minutes, please complete an online survey. The survey is composed of questions that address your definition of student learning outcomes, how you perceive them to be used at your college at both the course and the program level, your beliefs about their effectiveness in enhancing learning, and some questions (demographic) used to describe the respondents in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. You may skip any question you choose not to answer for any reason.

Your answers are completely anonymous.

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at UNC-Chapel Hill at 919-966-3113 or by email to [IRB\\_subjects@unc.edu](mailto:IRB_subjects@unc.edu), please refer to study number 07-207.

You may contact me with any questions, comments or concerns that you may have at (919) 718-7295 or by email ([lchapman@ccc.edu](mailto:lchapman@ccc.edu)). You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Barbara Day, at (919)-962-7739 or by email ([bday1@email.unc.edu](mailto:bday1@email.unc.edu)). The survey and instructions for completing it can be accessed at the following website (URL of survey will go here).

Thank you very much for your participation!

Sincerely,

Researcher 1  
Lisa M. Chapman  
Graduate student in Curriculum and Instruction  
UNC- Chapel Hill School of Education

Researcher 2  
Barbara Day  
Professor of Curriculum and Instruction  
UNC- Chapel Hill School of Education



## Appendix II

### Email To Interview Prospects

Dear Faculty and Administrators,

My name is Lisa Chapman. I am a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. For my dissertation, I am investigating North Carolina community college faculty and administrators' beliefs regarding the impact of the regional accreditation process. If you have 20 minutes, please complete an online survey. The survey is composed of questions that address your definition of student learning outcomes, how you perceive them to be used at your college at both the course and the program level, your beliefs about their effectiveness in enhancing learning, and some questions (demographic) used to describe the respondents in this study. Your participation in this study is voluntary. You may stop participating at any time. You may skip any question you choose not to answer for any reason. Your answers are completely anonymous.

The survey and instructions for completing it can be accessed at the following website ([http://uncodum.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV\\_d4CyeqOEKBNXArY&SVID=Prod](http://uncodum.qualtrics.com/SE?SID=SV_d4CyeqOEKBNXArY&SVID=Prod)).

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at UNC-Chapel Hill at 919-966-3113 or by email to [IRB\\_subjects@unc.edu](mailto:IRB_subjects@unc.edu), please refer to study number 07-207.

You may contact me with any questions, comments or concerns that you may have at (919) 718-7295 or by email ([lchapman@cccc.edu](mailto:lchapman@cccc.edu)). You may also contact my advisor, Dr. Barbara Day, at (919)-962-7739 or by email ([bday1@email.unc.edu](mailto:bday1@email.unc.edu)).

Thank you very much for your participation!

Sincerely,

Researcher 1  
Lisa M. Chapman  
Graduate student in Curriculum and Instruction  
UNC- Chapel Hill School of Education

Researcher 2  
Barbara Day  
Professor of Curriculum and Instruction  
UNC- Chapel Hill School of Education

## Appendix III

### Email Implied Consent Letter

Community College Instructors' and Administrators' Beliefs Regarding the Accreditation Process that Involves Identifying and Assessing Student Learning Outcomes and Its Impact on Teaching Effectiveness and Student Learning

Date: 2-12-07

Dear Colleague:

My name is Lisa Chapman. I am a doctoral student in Curriculum and Instruction in the School of Education at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. My faculty advisor is Dr. Barbara Day, Professor of Curriculum and Instruction. For my dissertation, I am investigating North Carolina community college faculty and administrators' beliefs regarding the impact of the regional accreditation process.

Specifically, we are conducting a research study focused on how curriculum administrators and faculty, who have recently completed a self study under the current SACS reaccreditation process, view the effectiveness or potential effectiveness of learning outcome assessment. Your participation in this study is completely voluntary.

To participate you would be interviewed, in your office, at a time that accommodates your schedule in the next two weeks. I will conduct the interview and will audio tape it. The interview questions will address your definition of student learning outcomes and your belief in their effectiveness. Completion of the interview should take no longer than 1 hour. You are free to answer or not answer any particular question and have no obligation to complete answering the questions once you begin.

Your identity regarding your participation in this study will remain anonymous to everyone with the exception of me and my dissertation advisor.

You may contact me with any questions at (919) 718-7295 or by email ([lchapman@ccc.edu](mailto:lchapman@ccc.edu)). An e-mail response to this e-mail is requested to connote your consent or dissent to be a participant in this study.

All research on human volunteers is reviewed by a committee that works to protect your rights and welfare. If you have questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject you may contact, anonymously if you wish, the Institutional Review Board at UNC-Chapel Hill at 919-966-3113 or by email to [IRB\\_subjects@unc.edu](mailto:IRB_subjects@unc.edu). Please refer to study number 07-0207.

Thank you for considering participation in this study.

Sincerely,

Researcher 1  
Lisa M. Chapman  
Graduate student in Curriculum and Instruction  
UNC- Chapel Hill School of Education

Researcher 2

Barbara Day  
Professor of Curriculum and Instruction  
UNC- Chapel Hill School of Education

## Appendix IV

### Online Survey

#### ***ASSESSING STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES - REACCREDITATION***

National attention has been directed at the effectiveness of higher education and its reaccreditation process. We are specifically interested in beliefs regarding the emphasis on assessment of student learning outcomes. Faculty and administrators from your college were selected as possible participants in this study based on your college's reaccreditation date.

Your participation in this study is completely voluntary. To participate, please select or indicate the most appropriate answer for each of the following 13 questions.

Survey completion connotes your consent to be a participant in this study. You are free to answer or not answer any particular question and have no obligation to complete answering the questions once you begin. Your participation is anonymous. All data obtained in this study will be reported as group data. No individual can be or will be identified. We plan on publishing the results of this research as well as communicating these results to the professional associations. The time you take to complete this survey is appreciated. This survey can be completed within 15 minutes.

Q1. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes, (as defined by the SACS reaccreditation process), helps improve teaching at this college.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q2. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes helps improve student learning at this college.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q3. I understand what student learning outcomes are.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q4. I develop student learning outcomes for my courses.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q5. I assess student learning outcomes in my courses.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q6. My department collectively develops student learning outcomes for our program.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q7. My department assesses program student learning outcomes.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q8. I assessed student learning outcomes in my courses prior to this accreditation.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q9. My department assessed program student learning outcomes prior to this reaccreditation.

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral disagree
- Strongly disagree

Q10. Now that the decennial SACS reaccreditation process is complete, do you think this process was useful for your students?

- Strongly agree
- Agree
- Neutral disagree

Strongly disagree

Q11. (Optional) Please explain your answer to the previous question.

Q12. How many years have you been in your current position?

Q13. How many years have you been working in the community college system?

## Appendix V

### Interview Questions

1. One of the requirements of SACS is the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes. How do you define them? Do you think this process promotes program improvement—why or why not?
2. What were you doing with student learning outcomes prior to your preparation for reaccreditation?  
(Were you using them, but calling them something else—if so, what?)
3. How did you determine if your graduates had learned what they needed to learn to be successful?
4. Has this process influenced (your) teaching, the teaching of other faculty, student learning?...How?
5. In your view, what is the purpose of establishing student learning outcomes?
6. How do you develop student learning outcomes?
7. As an instructor, do you use student learning outcomes? Can you give me an example?
8. How do you assess student learning outcomes?
9. What do you do with the assessment results?
10. Has this process of identifying learning outcomes had any other impact, positive or negative?

## APPENDIX VI

### Pilot Study Survey

Please mark the most appropriate answer for each of the following 10 questions. While the value of this information depends upon your accurate completion of this survey, all responses will remain anonymous. The time you take to complete this survey is appreciated. This survey can be completed within 15 minutes.

Strongly Disagree    Disagree    Agree    Strongly Agree    Not Applicable

- |   |                          |                          |                          |                          |                          |
|---|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| 1. I develop student learning outcomes, as defined by the SACCS reaccreditation process for my courses.               | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 2. I assess student learning outcomes, as defined by the SACCS reaccreditation process in my courses.                 | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 3. My college assesses program student learning outcomes.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 4. My college collectively develops student learning outcomes for our program.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 5. I assessed student learning outcomes in my courses prior to this accreditation process.                            | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 6. My college assessed program student learning outcomes prior to this reaccreditation process.                       | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 7. My students know the expected learning outcomes for each course.   | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 8. My students know the expected learning outcomes for each program.  | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 9. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes helps improve teaching at this college.          | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| 10. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes helps improve student learning at this college. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Please answer the following.

11. Now that the decennial SACCS reaccreditation process is complete, do you think this process was helpful for your students?  
Please explain (optional)



## Appendix VII

### Pilot Study Survey Response - Instructor

**Please mark the most appropriate answer for each of the following 10 questions. While the value of this information depends upon your accurate completion of this survey, all responses will remain anonymous. The time you take to complete this survey is appreciated. This survey can be completed within 15 minutes**

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
1. I develop student learning outcomes, as defined by the SACS reaccreditation process for my courses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I assess student learning outcomes, as defined by the SACS reaccreditation process in my courses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My college assesses program student learning outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My college collectively develops student learning outcomes for our program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I assessed student learning outcomes in my courses prior to this accreditation process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My college assessed program student learning outcomes prior to this reaccreditation process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My students know the expected learning outcomes for each course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. My students know the expected learning outcomes for each program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes helps improve teaching at this college.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes helps improve student learning at this college.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Please answer the following .**

11. Now that the decennial SACS reaccreditation process is complete, do you think this process was helpful for your students?  
Please explain (optional).

Answers to above: 1. agree 2. agree 3. we are in the process of beginning to assess program outcomes 4. we are in the process of beginning to assess learning outcomes across the college 5. sure, but did not articulate and break out exactly what the outcomes were 6. again, we have not used this language before but we certainly grade our students according to sets of expectations which are the same things as student learning outcomes 7. again, they know what to expect, they know course objectives, they know they need to write clearly and effectively, for example, but they are not asked to articulate ‘student learning outcomes’ 8. no. do you mean do they know the outcomes for science, for opticianry, for nursing? 9. that remains to be seen 10. maybe

I will answer this question in the future tense as we are only in the preliminary stages of assessing student outcomes. From what I understand, the SACS reaccreditation process is ongoing — the QEP, for example, is a five year plan and we are in year 1. Couched in terms of a UT instructor, whose classes reflect the same coursework as freshman and sophomore courses at NCSU and UNC-CH, on balance, the answer is ‘maybe’. I will ask my students to do more critical thinking in terms of making arguments in class. But really, this entire process takes time and energy away from real teaching. It presumes and asks faculty to think in pedagogical terms that are, to my mind, greatly abstract. I do not find this useful. I think for my students, such language and thinking is even MORE difficult than it is for me and my colleagues. Only the smartest of my colleagues can even get their heads around this endeavor. It asks us to take the time to translate our current teaching practices into these terms, Is this useful for faculty? Maybe, when it forces us to work and talk together, and provides the opportunity for us to learn from each other and to question and refine our teaching practices. For high-quality instructors, however, this is a waste of time, except that they may influence other instructors. Exchanges of ideas are never a bad thing, from that perspective. For me personally, it is NOT the way that I work nor is it a process through which I imbue my coursework with new ideas and projects and content.

Course outcomes are and should be much more specific. The problem for assessments of this nature at the community college lies in scope. The scope of program outcomes in a university transfer program dictate that those outcomes will be vague, generalized. Conversely, the real art of teaching lies in creative strategies to effectively promote, communicate, and apply specific course knowledge. I never met a learning outcome that accomplished this.

For the students: student success is profoundly correlated to faculty competence, knowledge, and enthusiasm. Taking precious time and energy away from already overworked faculty is not good for students. Students are busy learning course content and the expectations of applying this knowledge within the curriculum. What sense does it make for them to be articulating vague program outcomes? What must they think of us as we say, “Now you are in college and you must repeat back to me that our joint objectives are that you reflect adequate critical thinking skills, competent communication, both written and verbal forms, knowledge of discipline course content, comprehension of the scientific method, its design and application, and the correct use of current instructional technologies in this course”. To me, it is the fallacy of learning grammar, rather than language; of teaching for testing or assessments (external measures), and not the kind of real teaching that humans are made for which is holistic and down right interesting. But I am a humanities instructor, so that is my

bias, A meaningful student outcome is for students to gain concrete knowledge, to continue to believe after a course that knowledge is fascinating: they should crave the opportunity to apply what they learn and explore their education further, not recite remote and meaningless words that are nothing but vague. They are certainly aware of what they have to do to succeed and they learn this by taking our courses and passing or failing. If this process helps instructors identify areas in which their teaching is lacking, then that could benefit the students. The real test of our Program is how our transfer students do when they transfer to other schools. What are their grade point averages? Are they getting and retaining adequate employment with this education? Those are meaningful measurements. Other Programs have their own, no less intelligible and very real-world measures, which are anything but abstract.

Another huge problem for assessment of instruction in a community college UT Program lies in the general diversity and variability of student ability. I do not mean cultural diversity. If one assesses a Program, mustn't one ask what is to be done with the information? Are we responsible for student success (50%?, 75%?, 95%?) or are we responsible for educational opportunity? Therein lies a crucial distinction. The culture of accountability would swallow whole the endeavors of the open-door policy. If you hold instructors too responsible for student success, overall quality may suffer. So, in that sense, the answer to your question, "Is this process helpful to our students?" is "Maybe not."

The community college plays a crucial role within the current state of public education in this country. We are the doorway for immigrants from around the world, we are the threshold for high school drop-outs and those who need a second chance, those who need to learn a new trade, those for whom mental and physical illness and care for close family members has meant a delay in their education, those whom public education has failed to this point, those who cannot afford, financially, to attend a four-year school. Our open doors and the quality of our programs are both equally vital to the maintenance of a functioning local and national economy and a civil society. My fear is that assessments may, inadvertently, result in a decline in accessibility for students or in the standards of our programs. In summary, I see assessment as a potential impediment for high quality instruction in the classroom. I see it forcing the common denominator on everyone and not as a challenge for exceptional teaching, creativity, and student growth. I see it as 'paperwork'. And, I would bet that my colleagues in the Automotive Program and in Fire Protection Program see it the same way. However, I also see some value, from a Program's perspective, in taking stock of its courses and its faculty by looking at student learning outcomes. That is why I am involved in this work with my school. It is possible, on the far side of years of implementing assessment of student learning outcomes, that our students might benefit from the identification of weaknesses in the curriculum and in teaching. But the growing pains will be great and the risks will be significant.

## Appendix VIII

### Pilot Study Survey Response - Administrator

Please mark the most appropriate answer for each of the following 10 questions. While the value of this information depends upon your accurate completion of this survey, all responses will remain anonymous. The time you take to complete this survey is appreciated. This survey can be completed within 15 minutes.

	Strongly Disagree	Disagree	Agree	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
1. I develop student learning outcomes, as defined by the SACS reaccreditation process for my courses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
2. I assess student learning outcomes, as defined by the SACS reaccreditation process in my courses.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
3. My college assesses program student learning outcomes.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
4. My college collectively develops student learning outcomes for our program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
5. I assessed student learning outcomes in my courses prior to this accreditation process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
6. My college assessed program student learning outcomes prior to this reaccreditation process.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
7. My students know the expected learning outcomes for each course.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
8. My students know the expected learning outcomes for each program.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
9. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes helps improve teaching at this college.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
10. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes helps improve student learning at this college.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

**Please answer the following .**

11. Now that the decennial SACS reaccreditation process is complete, do you think this process was helpful for your students?  
Please explain (optional).

## **Appendix IX**

### **Pilot Study Interview Questions**

1. One of the requirements of SACS is the identification and assessment of student learning outcomes. Do you think doing this as a program has improved the quality of your program at your college?
2. Does this process promote program improvement—why or why not?
3. Has this process influenced (your) teaching?
4. In your view, what is the purpose of establishing student learning outcomes (SLO's)?
5. How do you determine student learning outcomes for a specific course?
6. How do you determine student learning outcomes for a specific program?
7. As an instructor, do you use student learning outcomes?
8. Do the established SLO's affect what you teach? How you teach?
9. How do you assess student learning outcomes?
10. Do you use component analysis?
11. What do you do with the assessment results?
12. What were you doing with student learning outcomes prior to your preparation for reaccreditation?  
(Were you using them, but calling them something else—if so, what?)
13. What was the purpose of course assessment?
14. What criteria were used for program assessment?  
(How did you determine if your graduates had learned what they needed to learn to be successful?)
15. Has it changed your teaching?
16. Do you think it changed the teaching of other faculty?
17. Has it impacted or do you expect it to impact student learning....and how?

18. Has this process of identifying learning outcomes had any other impact positive or negative on your program or your instruction?

## Appendix X

### Results of Online Survey – Questions 1-10

**1. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes, (as defined by the SACS reaccreditation process), helps improve teaching at this college.**

Statistic	
Mean	2.19
Variance	0.90
Standard Deviation	0.95
Total Responses	90

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly Agree	18	20%
2	Agree	49	54%
3	Neutral	14	16%
4	Disagree	6	7%
5	Strongly Disagree	3	3%
	Total	90	100%

**2. The process of developing and assessing student learning outcomes helps improve student learning at this college.**

Statistic	
Mean	2.01
Variance	0.80
Standard Deviation	0.89
Total Responses	90

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly Agree	23	26%
2	Agree	52	58%
3	Neutral	9	10%
4	Disagree	3	3%
5	Strongly Disagree	3	3%
	Total	90	100%

### 3. I understand what student learning outcomes are.

Statistic	
Mean	1.56
Variance	0.36
Standard Deviation	0.60
Total Responses	92

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly Agree	46	50%
2	Agree	41	45%
3	Neutral	5	5%
4	Disagree	0	0%
5	Strongly Disagree	0	0%
	Total	92	100%

### 4. I develop student learning outcomes for my courses.

Statistic	
Mean	1.71
Variance	0.57
Standard Deviation	0.76
Total Responses	89

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly Agree	39	44%
2	Agree	40	45%
3	Neutral	7	8%
4	Disagree	3	3%
5	Strongly Disagree	0	0%
	Total	89	100%

### 5. I assess student learning outcomes in my courses.

Statistic	
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Mean	1.71
Variance	0.50
Standard Deviation	0.71
Total Responses	89

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly Agree	36	40%
2	Agree	46	52%
3	Neutral	4	4%
4	Disagree	3	3%
5	Strongly Disagree	0	0%
	Total	89	100%

#### 6. My department collectively develops student learning outcomes for our program.

Statistic	
Mean	2.12
Variance	0.98
Standard Deviation	0.99
Total Responses	90

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly Agree	24	27%
2	Agree	44	49%
3	Neutral	11	12%
4	Disagree	9	10%
5	Strongly Disagree	2	2%
	Total	90	100%

#### 7. My department assesses program student learning outcomes.

Statistic	
Mean	2.2
Variance	1.03

Standard Deviation	1.02
Total Responses	90

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly Agree	23	26%
2	Agree	40	44%
3	Neutral	15	17%
4	Disagree	10	11%
5	Strongly Disagree	2	2%
	Total	90	100%


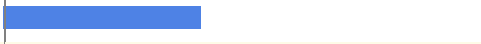



**8. I assessed student learning outcomes in my courses prior to this accreditation process.**

Statistic	
Mean	1.89
Variance	0.61
Standard Deviation	0.78
Total Responses	91

#	Answer	Response	%
1	Strongly Agree	27	30%
2	Agree	52	57%
3	Neutral	8	9%
4	Disagree	3	3%
5	Strongly Disagree	1	1%
	Total	91	100%






**9. My department assessed program student learning outcomes prior to this reaccreditation process.**

Statistic	
Mean	2.40
Variance	1.18
Standard Deviation	1.09
Total Responses	88

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Strongly Agree		18	20%
2	Agree		36	41%
3	Neutral		19	22%
4	Disagree		11	13%
5	Strongly Disagree		4	5%
	Total		88	100%

**10. Now that the decennial SACS reaccreditation process is complete, do you think this process was useful for your students?**

Statistic	
Mean	2.32
Variance	0.92
Standard Deviation	0.96
Total Responses	90

#	Answer		Response	%
1	Strongly Agree		16	18%
2	Agree		42	47%
3	Neutral		21	23%
4	Disagree		9	10%
5	Strongly Disagree		2	2%
	Total		90	100%

## Appendix XI

### Performance Measures for North Carolina Community College System

The 12 Performance Measures for the North Carolina Community College System are:

1. Progress of basic skills students
2. Passing rates for licensure and certification examinations
3. Goal completion of program completers
4. Employment status of graduates
5. Performance of college transfer students
6. Passing rates of students in developmental courses
7. Success rate of developmental students in subsequent college-level courses
8. Student satisfaction of program completers and non-completers
9. Curriculum student retention and graduation
10. Employer satisfaction
11. Business/Industry satisfaction with services provided
12. Program enrollment

MEASURE	STANDARD
Progress of Basic Skills Students	75%
Passing Rates on Licensure/ Certification Exams for First-Time Test Takers	Aggregate = 80% Exams = 70%
Goal Completion for Completers	95%
Employment of Graduates	95% (adjusted)
Performance of College Transfer Students	Equivalent to Native UNC Sophomores and Juniors
Passing Rates in Developmental Courses	70%
Success Rate of Developmental Students in Subsequent College Level Courses	Developmental Students Perform as Well as or Better Than Nondevelopmental Students at a Statistically Significant Level
Student Satisfaction of Completers and Non-completers	90%
Curriculum Student Retention & Graduation	60%
Employer Satisfaction with Graduates	85%
Business/Industry Satisfaction with Services Provided	90%
Program Enrollment	No Programs With Three-Year Average Annual Enrollment of less than 10

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