

**Building Capacity, Fostering Institutionalization:
A Study of Assessment at Independent Colleges
in the United States**

Abstract and Summary Data

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Jocelyn S. Chong, Ph.D.
Claremont Graduate University
Claremont, CA

ABSTRACT

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by

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The literature on higher education assessment provides a historical context for this study and describes best practices and their challenges. While research studies have examined institutional efforts on a case-by-case basis, little quantitatively empirical research has been conducted concerning the extent to which institutions have built capacity for assessment. Given the current climate calling for greater assessment efforts, a deeper understanding of assessment institutionalization is necessary.

Using adapted conceptual frameworks from the higher education and evaluation literature, an 81-item survey instrument was created. Six dimensions - resources, policies and practices, organizational and administrative support, multiple approaches, shared belief and commitment, and continuous learning - served as independent variables. Assessment institutionalization, data utilization and diffusion served as dependent variables where diffusion refers to the degree to which assessment knowledge is shared. Responses from 395 (46%) chief academic officers at regionally-accredited private higher education institutions were collected.

Descriptive analyses were conducted to provide a demographic profile of the institutions and to determine existing aspects of assessment. Results using one-way ANOVA to disaggregate data by institutional type revealed that master's institutions had higher levels of resources, policies and practices, continuous learning and assessment institutionalization. Baccalaureate institutions had higher levels of organizational and administrative support while special focus institutions had higher levels of shared belief, multiple approaches, data utilization and diffusion.

Using reliability tests to create composite scales, a series of regression analyses identified significant variables predicting data utilization, diffusion and institutionalization. Results indicate that having policies and practices was the strongest predictor of data utilization while engaging in continuous learning was the strongest predictor of diffusion for all institutional types. Data utilization was the strongest predictor for institutionalization. Institutional characteristics proved to be either insignificant or generally weak predictors of data utilization, diffusion and institutionalization.

This study's findings supplement the existing body of knowledge by offering a conceptual model of capacity building and institutionalization. It underscores the notion that despite strong organizational and administrative support, capacity progress is dampened by inadequate resources and policies. Finally, this study affirms institutional heterogeneity and recommends that attention be paid to such differences in future assessment research.

SUMMARY DATA

Student Assessment in Higher Education: A Survey of Chief Academic Officers (online)

Thank you for your interest in responding to this online survey, *Student Assessment in Higher Education: A Survey of Chief Academic Officers*. Your input is vital to the success of this study, and I greatly appreciate your assistance in facilitating the completion of my doctoral dissertation.

For the purpose of this study, “assessment” refers to the various means that institutions use to collect and interpret data that help demonstrate the effectiveness of student learning outcomes. This survey will take approximately 10 minutes to complete. You are also free to skip any questions as appropriate. Should you be interested, you will be provided the option of obtaining a summary of the results of this study upon completion of this instrument. The email address you provide at that point will be kept separate from any data analyses.

Once again, thank you for your help in this study and your commitment to deepening the understanding of assessment in higher education. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at jocelyn.chong@cgu.edu.

With much thanks,

Jocelyn S. Chong
Ph.D. Candidate
Claremont Graduate University

1. To what extent do you perceive your institution to engage in student assessment?
 - 0.3% Does not engage in student assessment
 - 3.3% Partially engaged in student assessment
 - 8.4% Engaged in student assessment but not institutionalized
 - 55.1% Partially institutionalized
 - 33.0% Completely institutionalized

I. Resources

Please indicate how frequently the following occur at your institution:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
2. A specific line item in department and administrative budgets is used for assessment (e.g. for consultants, travel costs, memberships, books etc.)	9.1%	14.2%	32.4%	22.5%	21.8%
3. Securing external funds for assessment	28.9%	30.2%	31.7%	7.5%	1.8%
4. Financial incentives are used to encourage individual faculty members and administrators to engage in assessment activities	40.1%	27.4%	20.6%	10.4%	1.5%
5. Release time is provided for individual faculty members and administrators who engage in assessment activities	19.3%	25.2%	37.4%	13.2%	4.8%
6. Incentives are offered to academic and administrative units to use student assessment findings	40.8%	24.6%	20.3%	11.8%	2.6%
7. Faculty and administrators turn to internal designated assessment experts for assistance	3.1%	5.9%	22.6%	55.7%	12.7%

II. Policies and Practices

Please indicate whether your institution has the following policies/plans in place:

	No	Yes
8. Has a formally adopted plan requiring <u>all</u> academic units/programs to engage in <u>specific</u> student assessment activities (i.e. based on an agreed-upon rubric)	36.5%	63.5%
9. Has a formally adopted plan requiring <u>select</u> academic units/programs (e.g. general education, core academic majors) to engage in <u>specific</u> student assessment activities (i.e. based on an agreed-upon rubric)	31.5%	68.5%
10. Has a formally adopted plan requiring academic units/programs to develop and conduct their own student assessment activities	19.9%	80.1%
11. Has a formally adopted plan stipulating that all assessment activities be conducted by a central entity (e.g. committee, assessment office)	77.8%	22.2%
12. Has no formal plan but academic units are encouraged to develop and conduct their own student assessment activities	74.9%	25.1%
13. Has a formal assessment plan in place but not engaged in activities yet	92.7%	7.3%
14. Is currently developing a formal plan for student assessment	73.3%	26.7%
15. Has no intention of developing or adopting formal plan for student assessment	97.8%	2.2%

16. Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the assessment policy position your institution has adopted.

2.8% Very dissatisfied

8.2% Dissatisfied

19.4% Neutral

59.1% Satisfied

10.5% Very satisfied

Please indicate how frequently the following occur at your institution:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
17. Engagement in assessment activities is considered in faculty tenure and promotion	22.2%	22.9%	30.4%	16.5%	8.0%
18. Engagement in assessment activities is considered in faculty salary increases or rewards (e.g. release time, travel funds etc.)	33.2%	23.4%	31.4%	8.3%	3.6%
19. Engagement in assessment activities is considered in performance evaluations for administrators	14.8%	17.9%	30.6%	25.4%	11.4%
20. Job descriptions include assessment responsibilities	10.0%	13.9%	36.2%	24.9%	14.9%

21. Is there an institution-wide committee/team with responsibility for planning and policy setting for assessment?

23.8% No

76.2% Yes

22. If yes, who serves on this committee? (please select all that apply)¹

6.6% President/Chancellor/CEO

71.9% Academic Affairs Administrators/Staff

41.5% Student Affairs Administrators/Staff

56.5% Institutional Research Administrators/Staff

70.4% Faculty (without administrative appointment)

Other: _____

23. Who chairs this committee? (please select all that apply)

2.0% President/Chancellor/CEO

40.2% Academic Affairs Administrator

1.0% Student Affairs Administrator

23.9% Institutional Research Officer

34.6% Faculty Member (without administrative appointment)

9.0% Other: _____

¹ Re. Q22 & Q23: Percentage > 100% because respondents were allowed to select multiple items.

III. Organizational and Administrative Support

Please rate the level of support your institution receives regarding student assessment.

	Very Unsupportive	Unsupportive	Neutral	Supportive	Very Supportive
24. Board of Trustees	1.3%	0.3%	27.1%	50.9%	20.4%
25. President/Chancellor/CEO	1.3%	0.5%	6.9%	44.2%	47.0%
26. Faculty Governance	1.8%	3.9%	24.6%	53.6%	16.1%
27. Academic Affairs Administrators	1.3%	0.3%	1.3%	31.7%	65.5%
28. Student Affairs Administrators	1.3%	0.3%	14.2%	45.0%	39.3%
29. Institutional Research Officers	1.4%	0.3%	5.8%	26.4%	66.2%
30. Other: _____	0.0%	0.0%	41.7%	30.6%	27.8%

IV. Multiple Approaches

Please indicate how frequently the following assessment tools are used at your institution:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
31. Survey instruments to assess higher-order skills (e.g. Collegiate Learning Assessment (CLA) etc.)	18.8%	14.7%	27.2%	25.2%	14.1%
32. Survey instruments to assess content knowledge in a specific discipline	4.9%	8.2%	36.5%	36.2%	14.1%
33. Student portfolios	3.1%	12.1%	48.7%	27.1%	9.0%
34. Observations of student performance (e.g. debate, lab, recital)	1.3%	4.6%	39.4%	41.2%	13.4%
35. Capstone courses or research projects	0.5%	2.0%	20.2%	48.0%	29.3%
36. Survey instruments that assess student satisfaction	0.5%	1.3%	15.0%	42.9%	40.4%
37. Survey instruments concerning alumni satisfaction	2.8%	13.6%	33.5%	28.1%	22.0%
38. Focus groups	6.7%	21.4%	46.4%	20.6%	4.9%
39. Longitudinal studies	11.4%	20.8%	38.7%	19.5%	9.6%

V. Shared Belief/Commitment

Please indicate how frequently the following occur at your institution:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
40. Conversations about assessment	2.3%	24.8%	62.3%	62.3%	10.6%
41. Assessment-oriented questions are asked during meetings and discussions	0.5%	3.9%	35.5%	53.4%	6.7%
42. Data from assessment are used for decision making	0.5%	4.1%	30.8%	52.3%	12.2%
43. There are committees that discuss student assessment issues	0.8%	5.7%	23.3%	50.1%	20.2%
44. There are processes in place for new hires to become engaged in assessment	8.4%	22.6%	37.8%	21.0%	10.2%
45. Assessment is included in the institution's mission and/or strategic plan	3.9%	9.5%	16.1%	31.3%	39.2%

Please rate the level of importance associated with why your institution elected to engage in student assessment.

	Very Unimportant	Unimportant	Neutral	Important	Very Important
46. Expected of the institution by external entities	1.3%	0.5%	2.6%	34.3%	61.4%
47. Preparing for an accreditation visit	1.3%	0.8%	3.1%	31.9%	63.0%
48. Meeting federal/state reporting requirements	4.9%	6.7%	21.8%	35.2%	31.3%
49. Improving undergraduate student learning	1.0%	0.5%	4.4%	31.5%	62.5%
50. Guiding academic program improvement	0.8%	1.3%	4.3%	38.6%	55.0%
51. Improving faculty instruction	1.0%	2.1%	13.6%	44.9%	38.5%
52. Guiding resource allocation	2.3%	5.2%	34.1%	38.3%	20.1%
53. Other: _____	0.0%	0.0%	66.7%	8.3%	25.0%

VI. Continuous Learning

Please indicate the degree to which the following are used at your institution:

	Never/Not Established	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
54. A formal computer-based knowledge management system (e.g. internal website, SAKAI) to capture, store, and disseminate assessment resources (e.g. data files, instruments, reports etc.)	44.1%	9.7%	18.4%	15.5%	12.3%
55. A physical central location (e.g. dedicated space, assessment office etc.) for faculty and administrators to obtain information about assessment	24.9%	12.6%	18.8%	22.5%	21.2%

Please indicate how frequently the following occur at your institution:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
56. Funds and encourages attendance at external conferences and professional development workshops on assessment	1.3%	6.5%	45.2%	37.2%	9.8%
57. Sponsors internal institution-wide seminars and forums on assessment	3.6%	15.5%	43.2%	31.0%	6.7%
58. Creates opportunities for faculty and administrators to showcase assessment efforts within the campus community	5.2%	24.6%	44.0%	21.0%	5.2%
59. Sponsors informal lunch/fireside chats on assessment	13.4%	27.1%	41.9%	16.0%	1.6%
60. Sends email blasts and/or newsletters with information on assessment	16.9%	33.5%	33.2%	13.2%	3.2%
61. Other: _____	25.0%	15.0%	20.0%	10.0%	30.0%

Data Utilization

Please indicate how frequently the following occur at your institution:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
62. Assessment findings are used to improve general education curricula	2.1%	9.7%	33.9%	36.5%	17.8%
63. Assessment findings are used to improve out-of-classroom learning experiences (e.g. internships, service learning etc.)	2.4%	10.2%	42.0%	35.4%	10.0%
64. Assessment findings are used to improve student academic support services (e.g. advising, tutoring etc.)	2.4%	7.9%	35.9%	39.1%	14.8%
65. Assessment findings are used to improve faculty instruction	0.8%	6.1%	39.8%	39.8%	13.5%
66. Assessment findings are used for academic program/department reviews	2.4%	4.8%	23.5%	34.1%	35.2%
67. Assessment findings are used in the faculty promotion and tenure process	21.4%	26.5%	28.3%	13.4%	10.4%
68. Assessment findings are used to decide on faculty remuneration (e.g. salaries, release time, travel funds etc.)	39.1%	33.1%	19.1%	6.4%	2.4%

Diffusion

Please indicate how frequently the following occur at your institution:

	Never	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Always
69. Active communication and discussion concerning assessment occurs within the institution in formal settings (e.g. presentations to trustees etc.)	1.6%	10.6%	42.3%	38.1%	7.4%
70. Active communication and discussion concerning assessment occurs within the institution in informal settings (e.g. over lunch, faculty lounge etc.)	2.1%	11.5%	49.6%	32.2%	4.6%
71. Assessment experiences are shared with others external to the institution in formal settings (e.g. at conferences)	6.1%	24.7%	46.0%	20.5%	2.7%
72. Assessment experiences are shared with others external to the institution in informal settings (e.g. listservs, personal networks etc.)	5.9%	27.3%	47.4%	17.4%	1.6%

Demographic Information

73. Please indicate your institution's Carnegie classification. (If unsure, you may confirm your institution's designation at www.carnegiefoundation.org/classifications/index.asp?key=782)
- 6.9% Baccalaureate/Associate's
 - 42.5% Baccalaureate
 - 31.4% Master's
 - 11.3% Doctoral/Research
 - 1.8% Research
 - 6.1% Special Focus
 - 0.0% Tribal
74. Please indicate if you work at a special-interest institution. (*please select all that apply*)
- 3.3% Hispanic-serving institution
 - 2.5% Traditionally black college/university
 - 0.3% Tribal college
 - 42.5% Religious-affiliated
 - 4.3% Women's college
 - 0.5% Men's college
 - 24.1% Not applicable
 - Other: _____
75. Please indicate your institution's selectivity.
- 3.6% All high school graduates accepted
 - 35.4% More than 75% accepted
 - 37.1% 51%-75% accepted
 - 15.4% 26%-50% accepted
 - 6.6% 10%-25% accepted
 - 1.9% Fewer than 10% accepted
76. What is your institution's total Fall 2008 full-time equivalent (FTE) undergraduate student enrollment?
- 11.6% Less than 500
 - 21.2% 500 – 999
 - 33.3% 1,000 – 1,999
 - 24.6% 2,000 – 4,999
 - 6.6% 5,000 – 9,999
 - 2.1% 10,000 – 19,999
 - 0.5% 20,000 – 29,999
 - 0.0% More than 30,000

77. What is your institution's total Fall 2008 full-time equivalent (FTE) faculty?
- 15.8% Less than 50
 - 28.9% 50 – 99
 - 31.8% 100 – 199
 - 13.9% 200 – 499
 - 4.8% 500 – 999
 - 2.9% 1,000 – 1,999
 - 1.6% 2,000 – 2,999
 - 0.3% More than 3,000
78. Please indicate the institutional accrediting agency from which you receive accreditation.
- 16.7% Middle States Commission on Higher Education
 - 8.5% New England Association of Schools and Colleges
 - 39.3% North Central Association of Schools and Colleges
 - 4.8% Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities
 - 22.5% Southern Association of Schools and Colleges
 - 8.2% Western Association of Schools and Colleges
79. How long has the president/chancellor/CEO of your institution served in that capacity?
- 9.5% Less than one year
 - 9.3% Between 1 and 2 years
 - 28.0% Between 2 and 5 years
 - 23.0% Between 5 and 10 years
 - 23.0% Between 10 and 20 years
 - 7.1% More than 20 years
80. How long has the chief academic officer of your institution served in that capacity?
- 17.9% Less than one year
 - 15.8% Between 1 and 2 years
 - 32.2% Between 2 and 5 years
 - 25.6% Between 5 and 10 years
 - 8.2% Between 10 and 20 years
 - 0.3% More than 20 years
81. How long has your institution engaged in student assessment?
- 2.7% Less than one year
 - 3.5% Between 1 and 2 years
 - 19.2% Between 2 and 5 years
 - 37.3% Between 5 and 10 years
 - 26.7% Between 10 and 20 years
 - 10.7% More than 20 years