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Student Learning Assessment in the Social Sciences: Establishing A National Baseline for Criminal Justice Programs

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STUDENT LEARNING ASSESSMENT IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES: ESTABLISHING A NATIONAL BASELINE FOR CRIMINAL JUSTICE PROGRAMS

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy at Virginia Commonwealth University.

by

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Abstract

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This dissertation focuses on student learning outcomes assessment in criminal justice programs in American colleges and universities. Particularly, this research sought to establish a baseline understanding about how criminal justice programs are measuring student achievement toward learning outcomes. The baseline does not include what students *should* be learning or how that learning *should* be assessed; it includes only what is actually happening in criminal justice programs in terms of how student learning is being assessed. The baseline data were then compared to the results from two studies that focused on student learning assessment in political science departments and public relations programs in institutions of higher education.

The population for this research included 834 two- and four-year accredited institutions of higher education that offer a degree in criminal justice/criminology. A total of 369 criminal justice programs were included in the randomly-generated sample, and 44 percent of these programs completed the online questionnaire.

The online survey instrument used for this research consists of 30 questions that are aligned with the "ideal type" of learning assessment model where a set of learning objectives are developed, assessment instruments are created and implemented, data are regularly collected and analyzed, and changes are made to improve the curriculum/instruction.

The major findings of this research indicate that a large majority of criminal justice programs are assessing student learning to some degree, but many are using instruments that are documented as ineffective measures of assessment (e.g., grades, surveys, and Major Field Test). Also, a substantial number of criminal justice programs are located in institutions that place a high priority on learning assessment, but a small percentage of the programs reported that adequate resources are available for assessment purposes. Regardless of these factors, many criminal justice programs seem to be following the ideal type of learning assessment model where the process is completed by making changes to the curriculum and instruction to improve student learning and development. When compared to political science and public relations, it appears that criminal justice as an entire discipline is up to par in terms of its overall involvement in student learning assessment.

Chapter 1
Introduction

Beginning in the early 1980s, prominent leaders and theorists in higher education began to argue that focusing on student learning rather than teaching enhances students' college experiences, their academic performance in particular. This focus on student learning started as a result of external demands for institutions to demonstrate accountability by proving that they were offering students a quality education. Many stakeholders, including federal and state officials, college and university governing boards, employers, parents, and taxpayers in general, were pressuring institutions to provide evidence that their goals were being met, and that they were producing "learned" students who had gained the knowledge and skills necessary to enter the real world. There concerns were voiced in a number of reports released by various groups, including the National Commission on Excellence in Education, National Governors Association, National Institute of Education, and Association of American Colleges and Universities, that all have interests in the quality of higher education. These reports all addressed the need for reform and improvement in higher education, and more and better assessment of student learning was identified as a way to do that.

The earliest of these documented reports, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, was prepared by the National Commission on Excellence in

Education in 1983. It received a significant amount of attention from state legislatures as authors clearly articulated that this nation was indeed at risk of being consumed by the "rising tide of mediocrity that threatens our very future as a Nation and a people" (National Commission on Excellence in Education, 1983, p. 1). While this report focused primarily on elementary and secondary schools, one of its messages was that assessment practices in higher education needed to improve and academic instruction must become "learner-centered" and focused on student learning. A year later, perhaps the most influential of these reports was released by a group of educators sponsored by the National Institute of Education. Authors of *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education* recommended that college and university faculty actively engage their students in learning and frequently assess that learning, provide prompt feedback to the students about their performance, and set higher overall achievement expectations for their students (Banta, 2001).

In addition to these non-mandated calls for accountability in higher education, the federal government ordered all accrediting associations that are approved by the U.S. Department of Education to require that their member colleges and universities provide evidence of institutional outcomes. Specifically, accrediting agencies are required to verify that institutions and programs are awarding degrees only to those students who have demonstrated achievement of learning outcomes based on appropriate assessment measures (Banta, 2001). This mandate has caused all six of the regional accrediting organizations and most of the specialized accreditors to revise their criteria for accreditation. Institutions must now, by some means, incorporate the assessment of

student learning into their review process and use the results for improvement if they wish to remain or become accredited (Palomba and Banta, 1999). Because the focus is more on what students are learning and less on how they learn it, institutions can be flexible in their methods of instruction and assessment.

Although accountability demands and new accreditation standards have been instrumental in the push for student learning assessment, the most significant way that assessment is beneficial to faculty and students is helping faculty improve their curriculum and teaching methods based on the needs of the students. In turn, this can lead to the improvement of student learning and development which, according to many scholars, is the fundamental purpose of assessment (Messick, 1999; Palomba and Banta, 1999; Suskie, 2004).

In response to all of these pressures that have been placed on colleges and universities, a shift from a teacher-centered model of education to a "learning paradigm" occurred and revolutionized American higher education. Under the current learner-centered model of education, faculty focus on what and how students are learning, whereas under the "instruction paradigm," the main concern was giving lectures (Barr and Tagg, 1995). As faculty are increasingly following the learning model of higher education, they are becoming more than just an administrative "figure head" in the classroom.

While the reports and executive order previously described became known two decades ago, this is no indication that the higher education debate is over. The Commission of the Future of Higher Education, recently named by the Bush

administration, is currently examining whether standardized tests should be used in colleges and universities to prove evidence that students are learning. As expected, reactions to the idea of a nationwide, mandatory exam are highly divided. Some individuals see standardization as a way for institutions to demonstrate their effectiveness by showing what they are achieving, while others oppose the notion of a "one-size-fits-all, uber-outcome exam" (Arenson, 2006, p. 2). Regardless of their opinions concerning standardized testing, colleges and universities are struggling with the national debate and potential mandates that aim to incorporate national standards into their curricula to examine how well students are learning.

As shown in the next chapter, most of the assessment literature supports evaluating student learning and has recorded many advantages of participating in the activity. Nevertheless, several scholars have expressed their uncertainty, albeit well more than a decade ago. It is clear that colleges and universities have become more involved in assessment, but not everyone is convinced that focusing on outcomes is a solution to the problems that exist in higher education such as college graduates who cannot write and speak clearly, think critically, problem solve, and those who are not prepared to enter the workforce. In 1988, Westling stated that assessment was based on unfounded evidence that higher education in the United States was in trouble or in need of reform. He asked this question: "Does anyone really believe that the failure of colleges and universities to produce adequately educated young people is the consequence of our failure to develop precise instruments to measure what we are doing?" (Westling, 1988 as cited in Bogue and Hall, 2003, p. 136).

A year later, a similar voice was heard boldly stating that the measurement of student performance will not, by itself, lead to the improvement of student learning. Measuring student learning could, in fact, "interfere with learning if standardized or intrusive measures shape teaching and curriculum" (Benjamin, 1989, as cited in Bogue and Hall, 2003, pp. 136-137). Finally, in the early 1990s, Astin (1991) claimed that "although a great deal of assessment activity goes on in America's colleges and universities, much of it is of very little benefit to either students, faculty, administrators, or institutions. On the contrary, some of our assessment activities seem to conflict with our most basic educational mission" (p. ix as cited in Bogue and Hall, 2003, p. 137). While these arguments appear valid on the surface and stem from credible, scholarly sources, there is an abundance of research and literature that would suggest otherwise.

With so much attention on student learning assessment, it is surprising that some academic programs within institutions have been able to avoid the scrutiny that has been associated with institutions of higher education for decades. Perhaps this is because entire institutions, rather than their academic components, are more commonly in the public's line of fire. Some individual disciplines (e.g., business, engineering, medicine, journalism and mass communications, social work, etc.) have their own accreditation standards, but others, like criminal justice, do not. Criminal justice does, however, have the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences, which has recently created certification standards that supplement the regional accreditation process by providing guidance for the internal and external evaluation of criminal justice programs. The goal of the ACJS Certification Standards is to improve the quality of criminal justice education. Thus,

programs seeking certification must be able to prove their effectiveness by demonstrating that students are learning in accordance with program learning objectives.

Regional accrediting commissions, which accredit entire institutions and not individual programs within, expect the academic programs that reside in accredited institutions to engage in assessment on a regular basis. Therefore, criminal justice programs that are currently not assessing student learning will be expected to do so. The challenge, however, is that little is known about assessment of student learning in criminal justice programs. A few criminal justice programs and departments have contributed to the scholarly literature by sharing their assessment experiences (see Chapter 2), but there are no overall summary data that indicate the current state of student learning assessment, particularly how it is being done, in criminal justice education. In fact, referring to the general assessment literature, Tontodonato (2006) insisted that it is "fragmentary, dispersed over many arenas, and not often subject to scholarly review" (p. 164).

With the significance of assessment as a backdrop and the lack of scholarship about how it is being done, it is important that research is conducted to determine the current state of student learning assessment in criminal justice education. With the exception of subjects like social work, psychology, and general education, there is a large void in the literature pertaining to learning assessment in the social sciences, particularly in the younger, more applied disciplines like criminal justice. While general education is not a social science discipline, it often encompasses core competencies (e.g., reading and comprehension, writing, speaking, critical thinking, application, etc.) that are

demonstrated or achieved through many courses that are considered part of the social science curriculum. Assessment in general education is typically conducted to measure these core competencies. Since the coursework and assignments used in these assessments are, to some degree, from the social sciences, the results of such assessment activities are included in the comparisons made in the next chapter about assessment in various social science disciplines.

The current research is a descriptive study focusing on the present state of student learning assessment in academic criminal justice programs. Its purpose is to establish a national baseline about what is being done to assess student learning outcomes in criminal justice programs in colleges and universities across the nation. The research proposes to answer the following question: *What is the current status of student learning outcomes assessment, in terms of how it is being conducted, in criminal justice programs within institutions of higher education across the nation?*

While there are many forms of assessment that take place in educational settings, this research specifically focuses on how criminal justice programs measure or conduct student learning outcomes assessment – assessment that focuses on intended student learning outcomes, which are statements of expectations for students concerning the knowledge, skills, and abilities they should gain or enhance from majoring in criminal justice. This research project does not address what students *should* know or learn in these criminal justice programs or how that learning *should* be assessed.

To establish a baseline, a web-based survey will be emailed to criminal justice program directors and department chairs at more than 350 different colleges and

universities (two- and four-year institutions) in the country that offer a degree in criminal justice or criminology. The survey is adapted from a questionnaire developed by two political scientists who aimed to determine how student learning outcomes were being assessed in political science departments in the United States. This research will not only determine which assessment instruments criminal justice programs use to measure student achievement toward learning objectives but, unlike the political science study, it will also establish how well these instruments are working.

Overall, this research will identify the following characteristics related to criminal justice programs in the sample:

- Learning objectives that have been established;
- How and when learning objectives were developed;
- Assessment instruments used and how well they work;
- Techniques of data analysis;
- Conclusions drawn as a result of data analysis;
- Changes made as a result of conclusions; and
- Available resources to perform student learning assessment activities.

After a baseline has been established, it will be compared to existing assessment data in other social science disciplines including political science and public relations. These were the only two studies found that presented overall summary data describing learning assessment in major fields of study in the social sciences. To date, comparative research of this kind has not yet been conducted. Therefore, this research will not only

contribute to criminal justice education, but it will also complement the social sciences and ultimately the scholarship related to assessment in higher education in general.

This research has the potential to benefit many criminal justice programs that are interested in starting the assessment process and those that are already engaged but are looking to improve elements of their assessment plans. Findings may shed some light on the ongoing debate about whether commonly used assessment instruments, such as standardized tests and grades in major coursework, are actually effective ways to measure student learning. This research can also make policy recommendations that facilitate the overall assessment process in criminal justice education, which may encourage more programs to get involved and ultimately enhance students' performances and their overall academic experiences throughout the discipline.

There are a few limitations that should be considered while completing this research:

- Programs that participate in surveys related to assessment are more likely than those who do not respond to currently be involved in assessment. This is typically the case for questionnaires that ask about task or group involvement. Thus, it is possible that data are not generalizable to or representative of the overall population of criminal justice programs.
- There is a shortage of comparative assessment data from other social science disciplines. The criminal justice survey results will be compared to assessment data from political science and public relations. This may not, however, be

representative of other fields of study in the social sciences. More research of this kind is needed in other social science disciplines.

- This is descriptive research only. It provides a description of what is or is not being done in criminal justice programs to assess student learning, not what should be happening in these programs. No actual outcome data are collected to evaluate their assessment approaches.

The following bulleted list contains a brief description of the information that is included in each of the four remaining chapters:

- Chapter 2 is a review of all of the literature relevant to student learning assessment in higher education. The discussion then funnels down to assessment in the social sciences, ending with assessment in criminal justice.
- Chapter 3 is a description of the research methods, including data analysis techniques, that will be employed to establish a national baseline about how student learning assessment is conducted in criminal justice programs.
- Chapter 4 is an analysis and in-depth discussion of the survey data and how these data compare to the results from the studies regarding student learning assessment in political science and public relations departments/programs. It also includes any changes made to the sampling process and methods of data collection and analysis.

- Chapter 5 is a summary of the research that includes major findings, limitations, policy implications, and recommendations for further analysis of student learning assessment in criminal justice education and the social sciences in general.

Chapter 2
Literature Review

A Brief History

During the 1950s and 1960s, World War II veterans began rapidly pursuing academic degrees, creating a history-making expansion of higher education. The upsurge in enrollment at colleges and universities, along with the backing of the Johnson administration, resulted in public acceptance that a college education held significant value. While federal and state governments provided generous support during this time, higher education was experiencing a financial crisis by the 1970s due to rising costs, inflation, and a sharp decline in private donations. In addition, the population of students enrolled in colleges and universities had become more diverse, and there was no longer a clearly defined goal associated with a college education. A combination of these factors resulted in questions concerning the knowledge, skills, and abilities of college graduates entering the workforce, the value of a college degree, and ultimately a movement to generate reform in higher education (Huba and Freed, 2000).

In the early 1970s, declining revenues from a recession caused much concern that enrollment numbers on college campuses would begin to decrease. In response to this anticipated regression in enrollment demand, states began to limit the resources awarded to institutions of higher education, yet, along with society, demanded more educational

services. When colleges and universities' requests for more funding were not answered, they began to increase tuition rates, a trend that sprinted into the next decade with full force (Burke, 2005).

Concerns from external bodies had moved from economy to quality in the 1980s, which was about the time when outcomes assessment and student learning were becoming part of the vocabularies of educators, practitioners, and policy makers. Through assessment, the focus of accountability was shifted from "centralized state regulations to decentralized campus processes for identifying the knowledge and skills that graduates should possess, developing the method for assessing the extent of their achievement, and using the results to improve institutional performance" (Burke, 2005, p. 7). The goal of assessment, as Burke (2005) put it, had moved away from focusing only on campus processes to "improving quality outcomes in student learning" (p. 7).

The impetus behind this shift toward quality and accountability stemmed from prominent leaders and theorists in higher education who began to argue that focusing on student learning rather than teaching enhances students' college experiences, especially their academic achievement. This led to a number of reports that were released addressing the need for reform in higher education, particularly the need for increased and improved assessment of student learning as a means to satisfy the calls for more quality and accountability. One report, *A Nation at Risk: The Imperative for Educational Reform*, was written by the National Commission on Excellence in Education (1983) and received a significant amount of attention from state legislatures. While this report focused primarily on elementary and secondary schools, one of its universal themes was

that assessment practices in higher education need to improve and academic instruction must become "learner-centered" and focus on student learning. The need for assessment in higher education was further addressed in reports issued by various organizations including the Association of American Colleges and Universities, National Governors Association, and National Institute of Education. These reports are discussed later in the chapter.

Assessment Defined

Assessment is a term that, to most non-academics, is defined as having little or nothing to do with education. In fact, the 2005-2006 *Merriam-Webster OnLine* definition of *assess* is "to determine the rate or amount of (as a tax)." Assessment in academia, however, has no relation to taxes or levies, and focuses predominantly on student learning and teaching. A few examples of definitions found in the literature pertaining to assessment in higher education are presented:

> Assessment is:
>
> the process by which one attempts to measure the quality and quantity of learning and teaching using various assessment techniques, e.g. assignments, projects, continuous assessment, objective-type tests, final examinations, and standardized tests (Page and Thomas, 1979, p. 26).
>
> the gathering of information concerning the functioning of students, staff, and institutions of higher education. *Functioning* refer[s] to the broad social purposes of a college or university: to facilitate student learning and development, to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and to contribute to the community and the society (Astin, 1991, p. 2).
>
> the systematic basis for making inferences about the learning and development of students; the process of defining, selecting, designing,

> collecting, analyzing, interpreting, and using information to increase students' learning and development (Erwin, 1991, p. 15).
>
> a program of locally designed and operated evaluation research intended to determine the effects of a college or university on its student, centered on learning outcomes, and engaged in principally for the purpose of improving teaching and learning (American Association for Higher Education Assessment Forum, 1992, as cited in Ewell, 2005, p. 105).
>
> the means by which students' progress and achievement are measured, recorded and communicated to students and relevant university authorities (Miller et al., 1998, p. 4).
>
> the systematic collection, review, and use of information about educational programs undertaken for the purpose of improving student learning and development (Palomba and Banta, 1999, p. 4).
>
> the ongoing process of establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning; ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes; systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well student learning matches our expectations; and using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning (Suskie, 2004, p. 3).

Following the last definition of assessment, Suskie (2004) wrote that assessment is a continuous cycle, not a one-time process. In the last step, once the assessment results are used to "review and possibly revise approaches to the other three steps," the cycle starts over (p. 4). Often described as closing the loop or the bottom line in the assessment process, the use or distribution of assessment results transforms an institution's intentions to actual improvements.

Similarly, Allen (2004) described the assessment of student learning outcomes as a six-step process:

1. Develop learning objectives
2. Check for alignment between the curriculum and the objectives

3. Develop an assessment plan
4. Collect assessment data
5. Use results to improve the program
6. Routinely examine the assessment process and correct, as needed (p. 10).

This basic structure or process of assessment identified by Allen, along with others (Nichols, 1995a; Smoller, 2004), is considered by Kelly and Klunk (2003) who developed the political science survey from which the criminal justice survey used for this research was adapted, to conform loosely to the "ideal type" of learning assessment model. This ideal model is a continuous cycle that consists of developing a set of learning objectives that are aligned with the curriculum, creating and implementing assessment instruments, regularly collecting and analyzing data generated by the assessment instruments, and making changes to improve the curriculum/instruction based on results of the data analysis.

While the term "assessment" can mean many different things to many different people, in this research it is classified as student learning outcomes assessment – assessment that focuses on intended student learning outcomes, which are statements of expectations for students concerning the knowledge, skills, and abilities they should gain or enhance from an academic program.

The Why, What, and How of Assessment

From the time assessment in higher education began to gain importance until now, its definition continues to differ depending on who characterizes the term, its

purpose, and the political environment in which the assessment activity is taking place. This situation often makes it difficult for institutions taking on assessment to successfully carry out the process. According to Ewell (1987), there are a number of choices that must first be addressed before designing an assessment program. To address these choices, colleges and universities must answer three important questions: why assess, what to assess, and how to assess?

Why Assess

The purpose of assessment programs varies among institutions as some are meant to improve learning and teaching, while others are intended to demonstrate the effectiveness of teaching and learning efforts to governing boards and external audiences such as accreditation organizations. Suskie (2004) asserted that "assessing for accountability often means looking for aggregated information on strengths, while assessing for improvement often means looking for detailed information on weaknesses" (p. 53). Since most institutions consider both purposes – improvement and accountability – when assessing student learning, they must design assessment programs that achieve both ends. Suskie (2004) suggested that while initially focusing on institutional or programmatic *strengths* may reduce apprehension and strengthen interest among faculty and staff, focusing on *weaknesses* can sometimes be more rewarding because this approach to assessment is more likely to produce useful information.

Assessing for improvement is typically associated with formative assessment, which occurs while learning is still taking place, midway through a course or program. This type of assessment, which usually employs alternative methods of assessment

(discussed later in this chapter), is beneficial because students are given prompt feedback about their academic performance, and faculty can make immediate adjustments to classroom activities and assignments based on the results. The most important anticipated consequence of formative assessment is improved teaching and learning.

Assessment for accountability is often linked to summative assessment, which provides an overall snapshot of what students have learned at the end of a sequence of study, and often involves traditional means of assessment such as standardized tests. This type of assessment may not give students and faculty useful feedback on strengths and weaknesses as it is more of a final judgment about student performance rather than ongoing assessment during the performance. To provide further explanation, Suskie (2004) provided an example: "A published writing test that yields a single score on writing performance, for example, may tell external audiences how well students are writing but give faculty and staff no guidance on how to strengthen a writing program" (pp. 52-53).

What to Assess

The process in which assessment criteria are written in the form of learning outcomes is often referred to as "outcomes-based education" (Hadrill, 1995). Learning outcomes, or learning objectives as they are commonly termed, are statements that specify what learners will know or be able to do as a result of a specific learning activity, and are usually expressed as knowledge, skills, or attitudes. Donald (2004) asserted that the purpose of learning outcomes is to clarify instructors' expectations of their students' learning and to communicate to students clear expectations about what is to be

accomplished. In order to accurately assess student learning outcomes, the specified actions identified in learning outcomes must be measurable and observable by faculty and staff involved in the assessment process.

Determining the type of learning outcomes to assess is another decision that must be made by an institution designing an assessment program. There are numerous types of outcomes that can be assessed including knowledge, skills, attitude and values, and behavioral outcomes (Ewell, 1987). Knowledge outcomes emphasize cognitive content or what students know, whereas skills outcomes focus on the application of that knowledge or what students can actually do. Individual attitudes and values, such as motivation and liberalism, are strongly influenced by students' college experiences, yet it is difficult to determine the worth of such characteristics. Students' behaviors, including course selection and choice of major, are often expressions of the knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values acquired during their time spent in college. Although some of these behaviors are not considered outcomes of a particular learning experience, they are essential in measuring the effectiveness of an academic program.

Astin (1991) claimed that student learning outcomes have traditionally been classified into two main categories: cognitive and noncongnitive (or affective). These categories can likely be traced back to Bloom's (1956) taxonomy of educational objectives based around three domains: cognitive, psychomotor (practical skills), and affective. Cognitive outcomes, also referred to as thinking and knowing, involve the use of higher order intellectual activity such as reasoning and logic. Bloom introduced a six-item hierarchy of cognitive mental processes: knowledge, comprehension, application,

analysis, synthesis, and evaluation. In order to exhibit their achievement toward cognitive outcomes, students are asked to remember or recognize information, comprehend and apply information and principles, and critically analyze or solve problems in new situations. Affective outcomes refer to the attitudes, values, feelings, and beliefs of students. More difficult to assess, affective outcomes are often measured by less advanced techniques, like direct observation of students and data collected from written tests or student self-reports, than those used to measure cognitive outcomes. Nevertheless, Astin (1991) stated, "Crude measures of affective outcomes are relatively easy to obtain through self-administered questionnaires and inventories whereas measurement of cognitive outcomes normally require the more controlled conditions of proctored test administration and larger amounts of the student's time" (p. 43). While some educators tend to avoid assessing attitudes and values and direct their efforts toward more cognitive outcomes, most academic institutions also claim to be concerned about affective qualities and encourage their student to respect others, take responsibility, make good decisions, and be law-abiding citizens.

Clearly, the development of learning objectives is crucial to a successful assessment program, but spreading the word about them is equally important. Allen (2004) maintained that learning objectives should be widely distributed in college catalogs, program brochures, and department newsletters, and on department websites and syllabi. All faculty and staff, internship coordinators, and fieldwork supervisors should be aware of adopted learning objectives and should use them to help develop the curriculum, guide course activities, and facilitate learning. Students must also be made

aware of all learning objectives so they will know what they are expected to learn and, in return, can perform accordingly.

How to Assess

Last, before tackling outcomes assessment, an institution must determine the best approach particularly suited for it. Choosing an instrument that adequately measures student learning is one of the most important steps in the assessment process. Methods or instruments used to assess student learning should be based on the learning outcomes or objectives identified by faculty in a particular academic program or course. These outcomes must be specifically defined before they can be taught to students or measured by faculty using any assessment tool. Although many assessment techniques have been developed over the past two decades, an institution must consider costs, feasibility, and the individual needs of those involved in the process and interested in the resulting data. Regarding the choice of the right assessment instrument, Ewell (1987) specifically stated, "Determining an appropriate assessment approach is an art that depends on clear knowledge of what is intended, solid research about available instruments and about experiences of other institutions, and an accurate diagnosis of the local organizational and political climate" (p. 9).

Students' approaches to learning are impacted by many aspects of assessment practices including its methods and purpose. The following is an abstract, yet simple, example provided by Nightingale and O'Neil (1994) illustrating the effect assessment type has on student learning:

> Ask them to understand the physics and chemistry of muscle contraction, but test them on the names of the muscles, and they will 'learn' the names but not be able to explain how contraction happens. Ask students to understand narrative perspective in the novel but test them on the author's background and they will know a lot about the author and little about narrative perspective (pp. 149-150).

Clearly, how faculty assess their students' learning is a fundamental concept in this particular research. While the ultimate purpose here is to determine how criminal justice programs conduct student learning outcomes assessment, a general section briefly describing techniques often used to assess learning in higher education is important.

Assessment Methods

There are numerous ways in which assessment can be conducted, and it all depends on the unique characteristics of the program or institution involved in the process. The assessment system chosen must support the goals and objectives of the institution or any other academic unit engaging in this process. Baker (2004) described choosing an assessment method in the following way:

> Assessment and evaluation can be conducted in a variety of ways and based upon a variety of data sources. Because culture, characteristics, and mission are unique to each institution, a wide range of assessment systems is used to effectively demonstrate educational quality and institutional effectiveness. Some assessment systems are more formalized than others; some are more quantitative while others are more qualitative; some are well developed and others are evolving; some are adopted from outside the institutions while others are developed internally. Regardless of the specific strategy selected by the institution, assessment strategies and methods should be adapted to the unique context of the institution to produce multiple indices of quality and effectiveness to document the institution's effectiveness in fulfilling its mission and goals (p. 9).

As the quote indicates, there are a number of decisions to make when it comes to choosing an appropriate method to measure student achievement toward learning outcomes. Grading is a technique often used to determine if a student has learned what he or she is supposed to have learned. Using grades in major coursework alone, however, has received criticisms citing a number of disadvantages of this particular method as a means of assessment. Both Allen (2004) and Suskie (2004) argued that grading standards are too broad, vague, and inconsistent for meaningful assessment. Additionally, grades are criticized because they do not enable faculty to recognize a student's strengths and weaknesses, nor can grades determine what to change about the curriculum and/or methods of teaching. For example, if a student receives a B in a criminology class, it can be assumed that he/she has learned a good deal about crime and criminal behavior, but it is difficult to determine which course learning objectives have been satisfied and which require additional consideration.

Moreover, an overall course grade may not entirely reflect what a student has learned. Instead of solely using grades received on assignments and tests given throughout the semester, some faculty take into consideration other factors, such as class attendance and participation, when calculating the final grade a student receives in a course. Therefore, a grade of B could mean that a student met all learning goals for a particular course, but failed to attend class or participate in classroom discussions at the level that was satisfactory to the instructor. Conversely, a grade of A could be awarded to a student who did not necessarily master all aspects of the course, but received high

marks on class participation and attendance or other performance indicators that the instructor may use (Suskie, 2004).

The following statement about grading as a tool for assessment comes from an Australian professor associated with the Centre for the Study of Higher Education at the University of Melbourne. While it is understood that assessment in American higher education is different from assessment in colleges and universities in other countries, the following statement summarizes the views held by many educators and assessment experts as grading continues to be used to measure student achievement toward learning outcomes regardless of how well it works.

> Grading is the first thing that comes to mind when we think of assessment. We attach great importance to grading, yet it is simply the translation of measures of student learning into a point on an arbitrary scale. Grading will forever be a contentious issue because it is an attempt to produce a simple indicator of complex human performance. Grading should be seen as a necessary outcome from assessment, but it should not determine approaches to assessment (James, 1994, p. 2).

On a more positive note, however, Suskie (2004) maintained that grades most definitely have a place in an assessment program. Grades, like assessment, are an attempt to identify the knowledge and skills students have gained during a specific learning activity (e.g., an academic course or program). Grades can provide useful information if based on direct evidence of student learning, like tests, projects, papers, and assignments, that is linked to major learning goals that are clearly defined.

Methods for gathering evidence of student learning can be characterized as direct or indirect. Direct assessment methods require that students demonstrate that they have achieved a particular learning objective. They produce tangible, self-explanatory

evidence of what students have and have not learned. Direct methods prompt students to demonstrate their learning through various avenues including performances, creations, and responses to questions or prompts. A list of more specific direct assessment methods includes published and locally-developed tests, course-embedded assignments, senior capstone courses, and portfolios (Maki, 2004; Suskie, 2004).

Indirect assessment methods involve students or others reporting perceptions of how well students have achieved an objective. Often less convincing than direct evidence, indirect evidence includes signs or indicators that "capture students' perception of their learning and the educational environment that supports that learning" including student, alumni, and employer satisfaction surveys (Maki, 2004, p. 88). Indirect methods can also include exit interviews, focus groups, and reflective essays. Because results from indirect assessment methods alone do not provide the caliber of evidence shown in direct methods, they are often combined with the results of direct methods allowing observers to make comprehensive interpretations regarding the level of student learning. According to Suskie (2004), assessment efforts can consist of indirect evidence, but it should always be in conjunction with direct evidence as indirect evidence is not only less persuasive but may also be misleading. The following is an example describing how indirect evidence of learning is meaningful only when it is in the presence of direct evidence:

> When a student completes a calculus problem correctly and shows her work, learning is demonstrated *directly*. When the same student describes her own calculus abilities as excellent, she is demonstrating *indirectly* that she has learned calculus. Both of these pieces of information about the student's performance are important. For example, a student's perception

> that she is doing poorly in calculus when she is actually doing well would provide important information to both the student and the professor. However, indirect evidence – in this case, a perception – is less meaningful without the associate direct and tangible evidence of learning (Middle States Commission on Higher Education, 2003, p. 28).

Historically, standardized instruments have been the primary method used to assess student learning. If done professionally, they are meant to evaluate all students in the same way at the same time. What test designers really want with standardized tests is "insurance of fairness and consistency in the testing process and validity of the resulting data" (Erwin, 2005, p. 134). Standardized instruments are often required for student placement, achievement certification, or gatekeeping purposes. Simply put, standardized instruments can grant students entrance into college, keep students out of college, and allow or prevent them from graduating college. Among the most well-known of the college entrance exams are the American College Testing Program (ACT), Scholastic Aptitude Test of the Educational Testing Service (SAT), and the Graduate Record Examination (GRE).

There are also undergraduate major tests, like the Area Concentration Achievement Tests and the Educational Testing Service's Major Field Tests, that some departments and programs use as an end-of-program outcomes assessment tool for graduating students. These standardized exit tests are geared toward such disciplines as biology, chemistry, computer science, criminal justice, economics, education, history, political science, psychology, social work, and sociology. While these are all published tests created by external test companies, some institutions also choose to use their own locally-developed tests that are created by faculty and staff.

Despite their historical prevalence and perceived benefits, standardized assessment instruments are often criticized for lacking validity in measuring student learning. Validity, the extent to which a method measures what it is supposed to measure, is a characteristic often not found in standardized tests and has recently gained more attention, in part, due to the move toward outcomes assessment (Heywood, 2000). If, for example, a program is based on students' abilities to critically think and analyze a problem, come up with a solution, and then apply what they have learned to a real situation, using a traditional assessment method, such as a multiple-choice test, will not get at the heart of what the students have or have not really learned. Regardless of all the criticism concerning standardized instruments, they have always been around and continue to be used for learning assessment purposes (Maki, 2004). In fact, Astin (1999) asserted that standardized tests, including the "SATs, ACTs, GREs, and the like are probably going to be with us for a long time to come" (p. 174).

Because standardized instruments satisfy external audiences who make financial decisions or decisions aimed at comparing institutional performance, they remain important. Such assessment methods, however, should be carefully considered and must support the institutional and program-level outcomes, educational policies and practices, and curricular and instructional design. In order to give students a greater chance to successfully pass these standardized tests, many institutions and programs feel forced to teach the contents of the test rather than align the instruction with established learning goals, which can restrict the curriculum and students' approaches to learning. Standardized methods, in such cases, have no internal validity and must be accompanied

by internally-designed alternatives, which "provide us with the richest information about the efficacy of our own educational practices" (Maki, 2004, p. 94).

Although standardized instruments continue to serve as methods used in learning assessment, faculty and administrators in higher education are increasingly starting to move away from solely using such tools, and moving toward alternative, performance-based methods of assessment that sometimes replace or more often simply complement evidence of learning assessed through standardized tests. This shift is occurring for various reasons including the "need to assess a broader range of learning outcomes," the "need for assessment to guide and enrich learning," and the "need for assessment to support autonomy and self-evaluation" (Nightingale et al., 1996, p. 7). Birenbaum and Douchy (1996) provided further explanation concerning this transformation by stating:

> A shift has taken place from what some call a 'culture of testing' to a 'culture of assessment.' A strong emphasis is put on integrating assessment and instruction, on assessing process rather than just products and of evaluating individual progress relative to each student's starting point (p. 47).

Unlike traditional assessments where students are often instructed to choose a response from a given list, like multiple-choice, matching, and true/false tests, and then ranked according to the knowledge they have gained in a subject or course, alternative assessment is any type of assessment in which students actually create a response to a question or task. This more authentic form of assessment, which can include techniques such as research projects, essays, oral presentations, exhibitions, capstone experiences, and portfolios, may be more effective and feasible than mass standardized testing (Seybert, 1994). Authentic tasks are often multidimensional and require higher levels of

cognitive skills like problem-solving and critical thinking, whereas standardized, objective tests rarely function "beyond the level of simple recall and recognition" (Appelbaum, 1988, p. 125). A recently published paper in *Assessment & Evaluation in Higher Education*, however, posed the following question as its title: "How convincing is alternative assessment for use in higher education?" Answer: Less than convincing. Because of the task specification and grading consistency that is required in alternative assessment, according to the author, it is difficult for faculty to compare student performance making the validity of such techniques problematic (Maclellan, 2004).

Rather than show what they have learned through traditional means, performance assessments ask students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills through real-life tasks such as those often performed during internships or when using authentic data in case study analyses. Performance assessments typically have two components: the assignment or prompt that lets students know what is expected of them and a scoring guide or rubric used to evaluate completed work (Suskie, 2004). A rubric, in its simplest form, is a scoring tool guide that identifies criteria and levels of success for each criterion. This tool lays out the specific expectations for an assignment by "provid[ing] a detailed description of what constitutes acceptable and unacceptable levels of performance" for each component of the assignment (Stevens and Levi, 2005, p. 3). A rubric is a type of course-embedded assessment, used to assess a wide variety of assignments and tasks including research projects, term papers, oral presentations, essay tests, internships, and portfolios. Rubrics are useful because they can help improve student learning as they provide students with a better understanding of the assignment

and what is expected of them, and help to evaluate more "real-world" performances where problem-solving and critical thinking abilities are often used (Montgomery, 2002). Lopez (1999) highly recommended the use of a rubric to compare student performance across institutions. By comparing the performance of their students to that of students in similar institutions, faculty can use these benchmarks to be sure that students in their program will be competitive after graduation.

Furthermore, the use of a rubric, or any course-embedded assessment tool, is an activity that is already part of the course activities. This, along with students' inherent desires to perform well and the fact that the using a rubric does not require additional work for students, motivation among students is often higher. While this is a clear advantage of most course-embedded assessment techniques, a 2001 study found that this was not the case with the Collegiate Assessment of Academic Proficiency (CAAP), a standardized, nationally-normed assessment program from ACT used in postsecondary general education programs. Data from 1,633 students who took the test to evaluate whether the English, math, and critical thinking exams should be used as performance funding measures in the state concluded that the use of these exams was problematic due to a lack of motivation among students to give the tests their best effort (Hoyt, 2001).

Like with any type of assessment technique, there are also some limitations when using a rubric. Faculty commitment is absolutely essential, but often difficult to obtain. They are often resistant to the process and can make it challenging to reach a consensus about an assessment approach, especially one that will be implemented across courses

(VAG, 2005). Finally, this strategy is often costly in terms of time, particularly in general education classes where the number of students can reach the hundreds.

The last two types of alternative assessment that are discussed in this section are portfolios and capstone courses. These specific assessment methods were chosen because they may require further explanation for readers who may be less than familiar with the subjects. A portfolio is defined as a "purposeful collection of student work that exhibits the student's efforts, progress, and achievements." The collection must allow students to participate in "selecting contents, the criteria for selection, the criteria for judging merit, and evidence of student self-reflection" (Paulson et al., 1991 as cited in Hernon, 2004, p. 152). Portfolios, which can include research papers, essays, self-evaluations, journals, case studies, and so on, have been used in student outcomes assessment since the early 1970s. However, they were not considered practical assessment tools until the late 1980s when several articles were published indicating their effectiveness in evaluating academic programs like general education. Furthermore, in 1991, the portfolio was recognized as one of six methods in assessment processes by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, which is one of the six regional accrediting organizations that are addressed later in the chapter (Black, 1993).

As the state of technology advances in higher education, institutions are turning to web-based portfolios. They serve the same purpose as the traditional print portfolios, yet they are created, accessed, and monitored electronically. Alverno College, for example, uses the Diagnostic Digital Portfolio (DDP), a web-based system used to monitor patterns and progress in student learning. It serves as a mechanism to store and process the

feedback students receive from faculty, external assessors, and peers, and provides data based on student performance that graduates can use to create an electronic resume for graduate school or potential employers (Hernon, 2004). A 2001 study discovered that students feel that web portfolio systems help control their learning processes and serve as an effective means of communication with faculty, other students, and external audiences (Chen et al., 2001). According to Ewell (2005), a web-based portfolio is one way to conduct business effectively and publicly so that accreditors and potential investors and clients can be certain that the institution is using its resources in a way that results in quality improvement.

A capstone is a course intended for students approaching graduation that emphasizes real-world situations and builds on knowledge and skills acquired in previous classes. It provides students with an opportunity to demonstrate that they are capable of doing what is expected of them "through some type of product or performance" (Palomba and Banta, 1999, p. 124). Capstones are beneficial to both students and faculty; they allow majors with a final opportunity to perform the skills they will need to succeed after graduation, on the job, or in graduate school, and they provide faculty another chance to assess whether or not they have fulfilled the mission of the their department or program by producing students who are capable of applying what they have learned in their previous semesters (APA, 2002).

Another reason additional discussion is provided on portfolios and capstone courses is because the use of both assessment tools in higher education assessment is pronounced in the literature, albeit limited and most often involving accredited, well-

established disciplines (e.g., engineering) and areas of the "hard sciences" (e.g., chemistry and physics). The studies related to capstone courses, which are dominated by the engineering discipline, are more notable because they provide real evidence of what can occur as a result of using such courses to assess student learning. A few examples of these results are provided:

- A two-semester senior design capstone course in engineering education was developed at Brigham Young University and resulted in over 300 industry-sponsored projects designed and built by student teams over a ten-year period (Todd and Magleby, 2005).

- Civil engineering educators use freshman engineering and a senior capstone course to integrate new topics that teach students about design and problem-solving without increasing the number of required credit hours (Grigg et al., 2004).

- Over a decade ago, the University of Rhode Island's Civil Engineering Department added a theme design project to it curriculum. The project, which students begin their junior year, is completed in a senior capstone course. Some of the completed projects include a reservoir-dam complex, a new civil engineering building, and a resource-recycling facility (McEwen, 1994).

This leaves a large void in the literature regarding assessment in the social sciences in general and more specifically, how social science disciplines, including criminal justice, are conducting student learning outcomes assessment. This shortage of scholarship is particularly noticeable in the younger, non-accredited disciplines like criminal justice, hence the need for this research.

In summary, regardless of which type of instrument an institution chooses, there are restrictions to relying on one method, as opposed to a combination of methods, to assess student learning. Using one instrument often limits the interpretations of student achievement within the parameters of that method, while using multiple methods to

assess the learning described in outcome statements is beneficial to students and faculty. Students are often able to demonstrate learning using one assessment tool while they may not have been successful within the context of another tool. Using more than one assessment method encourages comprehensive interpretations of student achievement as opposed to making conclusions that are sometimes biased based on one type of technique. For example, there is a student who has excellent writing skills but does not do well on standardized tests. Obviously, a multiple-choice test would not fully gauge this student's learning. Therefore, in addition to the standardized test, another instrument, like a term paper or essay test, would need to be implemented to adequately assess the academic performance of this particular student. Choosing an inappropriate assessment task, said Nightingale et al. (1996), is the factor most likely to undermine the achievement of learning objectives.

The next several sections of this chapter address the driving forces of assessment in higher education including the revolution in higher education, calls for improvement and accountability, and accreditation requirements.

Driving Forces of Assessment

As the focus on student learning outcomes assessment began to surface in the early- to mid-1980s, Hartle (1986) came up with five functions of assessment in institutions of higher education:

1. Mandated requirements to evaluate students and/or academic programs
2. To assess the value-added of a program in education

3. Use of standardized tests to measure general or specialized knowledge and skills

4. Decision making for the purpose of rewarding institutions for student performance on established criteria

5. The measurement of changes in student attitudes and values (Heywood, 2000, pp. 15-16).

This list signifies that the functions of assessment two decades ago centered mostly on mandates and standardized tests, with no mention of improving student learning and teaching or demonstrating accountability, the two central purposes of student learning assessment. It was during this time when a revolution in American higher education began taking place – a shift from a teacher-centered model of education to a learner-centered model of education. Barr and Tagg (1995) labeled this transformation in higher education as a shift from an "instruction paradigm" to a "learning paradigm." Under the teaching paradigm, faculty viewed their responsibility and the mission of the institution as providing instruction, primarily by delivering 50-minute lectures. Barr and Tagg (1995) described the traditional model of education with the following example:

> To say that the purpose of colleges is to provide instruction is like saying that General Motors' business is to operate assembly lines or that the purpose of medical care is to fill hospital beds. We now see that our mission is not instruction but rather that of producing *learning* with every student by *whatever* means work best (p. 13).

Under the current learning paradigm, educators focus on student learning and assume responsibility when a considerable number of students do not achieve their learning goals, rather than placing blame on the students. As faculty are increasingly following

the learning model of higher education and becoming more than just a "figure head" in the classroom, they are learning how to enhance their curricula and teaching methods to ultimately foster improved student learning and development (Barr and Tagg, 1995).

The focus on student learning rather than teaching came as a reaction to pressures from state and federal officials demanding evidence of student learning and overall institutional effectiveness, or how well an institution is achieving it mission and major goals. More than a decade ago, two authors boldly declared that "assessment is at the heart of the student experience" (Brown and Knight, 1994 as cited in Brown et al., 1997, p. 7). Brown, Bull, and Pendlebury (1997) continued in this same vein by pointing out that "assessment defines what students regard as important, how they spend their time and how they come to see themselves as students and then as graduates" (p. 7). Since student learning is the core of most institutional missions, the assessment of student learning is a major component of assessing institutional effectiveness. The value-added question of quality assurance and institutional effectiveness in terms of student learning outcomes in higher education is centered on changes in student knowledge, skill, attitudes, and values. From the beginning to the end of their college experiences, did students grow? Did they gain knowledge, skill, attitudes, and value while attending college?

These concerns were voiced in a series of reports published primarily in the 1980s by various groups with interests in the quality of higher education in the United States. These reports, which are discussed in the sections immediately following, called for an improvement in undergraduate education. They demanded more accountability – that

students who successfully complete a higher education degree know what they are supposed to know and can do what they are supposed to be able to do as college graduates.

Several authors voiced their opinions about why outcomes assessment is conducted, and accountability appeared to be the common denominator. Rossmann and El-Khawas (1987) suggested that outcomes assessment is undertaken for three fundamental reasons: political, economic, and educational. Political support of assessment came when state officials and other political entities began to question whether the large expenditures in higher education were justified. In other words, where does the money go and how well is it being spent? In terms of economics, assessment is needed in order to guarantee a "well-trained work force to support regional, state, and local economies" (Erwin, 1991, p. 3). In simpler terms, are college graduates prepared to enter the labor force and become productive, taxpaying citizens? Finally, assessment is supported due to calls for more accountability to prove that institutions are providing quality education.

Furthermore, Halpern (1987) presented three main applications of assessment data: program improvement, gatekeeping functions, and budget decisions and accountability. Assessments of student learning outcomes are often used to improve academic programs by making them more effective in meeting their overall objectives. Outcomes assessment conducted primarily for program improvement usually involve placement tests for new students and exit exams for graduating students to measure the learning achievements from their time spent in college. The key focus of assessment in

"gateway" models is to ensure that all students possess fundamental skills and knowledge when they graduate. However, there is a significant amount of concern that some college graduates do not have core competencies in certain areas of learning. Consequently, assessment programs based on gatekeeping functions are responsible for a majority of the criticism of outcomes assessment. Last, data yielded from some assessment activities are used to assist in budget decisions and accountability by determining whether parents' and taxpayers' money is being well spent on higher education.

There are many reasons that assessment is conducted in colleges and universities. Some of the most documented purposes of assessment are to measure students' achievement of learning outcomes, improve student learning and development, enhance the curriculum and ways in which academic programs are delivered, provide assurance of quality in higher education, demonstrate accountability at the request of institutional stakeholders, and maintain standards required for accreditation. More recent literature indicates that the most significant way that assessment is beneficial to faculty and students is by helping faculty improve their curriculum and teaching methods based on the needs of the students, ultimately improving student learning and development, which is the fundamental purpose of assessment (Messick, 1999; Palomba and Banta, 1999; Suskie, 2004). In a 1995 report issued by the Education Commission of the States, *Making Quality Count in Undergraduate Education*, assessment and prompt feedback was identified as one of twelve attributes of good practice in delivering quality undergraduate education. Extensive research has shown that when colleges and universities engage in these good practices, student performance and satisfaction will

improve (Huba and Freed, 2000). Consequently, many faculty and administrators in higher education are implementing assessment plans to evaluate the quality of, and ultimately improve, student learning and development.

Calls for Improvement and Accountability

As tuition costs and the number of students enrolled in colleges and universities started to increase, concerns about the quality of higher education followed suit. Parents expressed concerns about the value of their dollars being spent on their children's tuition, and government officials, including state legislators and governors, wanted to learn more about how well education was doing its job (Erwin, 1991). The National Governors' Association, along with other groups concerned with the quality of higher education, inspired the assessment movement by indicating that assessment is a way to improve such quality. The most prominent factor responsible for the assessment movement is the increasingly popular concept of accountability in higher education. One way to make institutions more accountable for the success or failure of their academic programs is more and better assessment that incorporates the evaluation of student learning (Astin, 1991; Huba and Freed, 2000).

In addition to parents and state officials, other groups of stakeholders, including governing boards, employers, and taxpayers, have also demanded evidence of institutions' educational effectiveness. Specifically, they want to know what students are learning and if it is what they are supposed to be learning. Those funding higher education are asking colleges and universities to demonstrate accountability by providing evidence that their investment generates significant results (Suskie, 2004). If institutions

can demonstrate through assessment that their students develop important, necessary skills, such as writing, critical thinking, and analysis, they are far more likely to receive support.

As previously mentioned, a number of reports were published during the middle part of the 1980s as a result of continuous requests from institutional stakeholders for colleges and universities to demonstrate more accountability in order to prove that they are providing quality education. These reports had three things in common, all citing the following needs of undergraduate education: 1) to focus efforts toward improvement on undergraduate education, 2) to study student learning as opposed to teaching, and 3) for additional funding to accomplish both of the previous proposed actions (Nichols, 1995). In addition to *A Nation at Risk*, one of the most influential of these reports is titled *Involvement in Learning: Realizing the Potential of American Higher Education*, and was written in 1984 by the Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, a group of educators sponsored by the National Institute of Education.

This particular report was the motivating factor for the First National Conference on Assessment in Higher Education held in the fall of 1985 in Columbia, South Carolina, an event that some believe marks the start of the assessment movement in American higher education (Ewell, 2002). In this report, authors examined what college students were actually learning and consequently recommended that their colleagues in higher education actively engage their students in learning, frequently assess their students' learning, and provide prompt feedback to the students about their performance (Banta, 2001). Furthermore, the report maintained that learning should be assessed by the

knowledge, skills, attitudes, and capacities students gain from being involved in the campus environment. *Involvement in Learning* produced many recommendations concerning assessment and feedback, three of which are listed:

1. Faculty and academic deans should design and implement a systematic program to assess the knowledge, capacities, and skills developed in students by academic and co-curricular programs.

2. In changing current systems of assessment, academic administrators and faculty should ensure that the instruments and methods used are appropriate for (1) the knowledge, capacities and skills addressed, and (2) the stated objectives of undergraduate education at their institutions.

3. Faculty should participate in the development, adoption, administration, and scoring of the instruments and procedures used in student assessment and, in the process, be trained in the ways of using assessment as a teaching tool (Chickering, 1999, p. 31).

The recurring theme in all three of these recommendations is the necessary participation of faculty and administrators in the design and implementation of an assessment program as well as the development/selection and adoption of assessment instruments and methods. These particular individuals are the "ultimate users of the results, the ultimate audience for dissemination" who must become involved in the very beginning and commit entirely to the process (Chickering, 1999, p. 31).

A year later, this call for accountability was again voiced in a report written by the Association of American Colleges and Universities (AAC&U) called *Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community.* It overtly called for improvement, and referred to the absence of accountability among academic institutions in higher education as "remarkable and scandalous" (AAC&U, 1985, p. 33 as cited in Erwin, 1991, p. 3). This particular report and *Involvement in Learning* were rated as the

two most influential reports about assessment by assessment expert T. Dary Erwin, Associate Vice President of Academic Affairs for Assessment and Program Evaluation at James Madison University, and one of the most recognized authors on the subject of assessment in higher education.

As the theme of increased accountability continued to grow, two additional influential reports, *Transforming the State Role in Improving Undergraduate Education: Time for a Different View* and *Time for Results*, were published in 1986 by the Education Commission of the States and the National Governors' Association, respectively. These reports both "argued for a more proactive role for state authorities in higher education based on a new conception of public accountability as return on investment" (Ewell, 1993, p. 343). *Time for Results* authors declared that "colleges and universities should be held accountable for establishing clear standards for performance with respect to student learning and that the results of student assessments should be publicly reported and coupled with consequential actions" (Ewell, 2005, p. 107). As this report was being issued, Colorado and South Carolina adopted assessment mandates requiring public colleges and universities to examine learning outcomes and report their findings. For several years, a few other states, including Tennessee and Florida, had been using standardized tests to conduct assessment. By 1987, the first year when the popularity of this growing trend of assessing learning outcomes was actually quantified, approximately a dozen states had similar mandates, and by 1989, this number had risen to more than half (Ewell, 2002).

With the presence of such reports advocating the involvement of state leaders in improving institutional effectiveness, most of the state-mandated assessment began to take place at this time. Before 1982, approximately one-third of the states required colleges and universities to conduct regular program reviews, but almost none of the states specifically required institutions to report on outcomes (Ewell, 1993). Additionally, none of the regional accrediting associations required institutions to examine and report on academic achievement until, in 1988, the federal government ordered all accrediting organizations that were approved by the U.S. Department of Education to include evidence of institutional outcomes in their criteria for accreditation.

In a 1986 report issued by the National Governors' Association's Task Force on College Quality, the governors of all fifty states summoned public institutions across the country to increase and improve their assessment activities. The governors noted that taxpaying citizens were entitled to understand the quality of education that students receive from publicly-funded colleges and universities (Astin, 1991). In response to the criticism of several southern governors during this time, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) became the first of the six regional accrediting organizations to introduce a new standard that focused on student learning outcomes assessment as a requirement for accreditation. Additionally, in 1989, SACS published the *Resource Manual on Institutional Effectiveness*, which was inspired by 18 months of discussion among experts about their experiences with implementing student outcomes assessment (Ewell, 1993; Nichols, 1995).

Once these reports, along with others, were made public and the idea of assessment in higher education had emerged, many more states came on board and began to develop and engage in assessment practices. In many cases, state authorities initially approached postsecondary assessment similar to the method in which K-12 evaluation was addressed. This approach predominantly consisted of "large-scale standardized testing" (Ewell, 1993, p. 343). After several years of this, political opposition and good judgment caused most states to adopt a new approach to assessment – an approach that was modeled after Virginia's assessment program, which is described:

> In 1986, the State Council on Higher Education in Virginia required all public institutions to prepare a local assessment plan embracing basic skills, general education, major-field outcomes, and alumni follow-up. Subsequent to plan approval, each institution was required to report results of its assessment program on a biennial basis, consistent with the state's higher education budgeting cycle. The Virginia approach allowed each institution a great deal of choice in defining learning goals and in selecting assessment approaches that best fit local missions, curricula, and student clienteles (Ewell, 1993, pp. 343-344).

While there were many benefits to this approach, including funds to support the development of assessment programs, there were negative features as well. Institutions that failed to propose an acceptable assessment plan were excluded from participating in programs that increase funding for assessment endeavors. Regardless of any negative aspects, most states, with a few exceptions (mainly New Jersey), followed Virginia's lead and developed a decentralized approach to assessment. By 1989, approximately two-thirds of the states had developed assessment policies roughly similar to those of Virginia (Ewell, 1993).

When addressing accountability in higher education, there are three primary forces from which pressures and interests arise: state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces. Combined, these three factors make up Clark's Accountability Triangle. According to Clark (1983), they have the most influence on coordination of higher education systems in the United States. State priorities, which represent political accountability, are often expressed by government officials and consist of public needs and desires for programs and services offered in higher education. Academic concerns, which represent professional accountability, refer to the interests of professors and administrators in higher education institutions. Finally, market forces, which represent market accountability, comprise the needs and demands of higher education customers including student, parents, employers, and others. Referring to the Accountability Triangle, Burke (2005) stated, "Higher education and its colleges and universities, both public and private, are inevitably accountable to state priorities, academic concerns, and market forces" (p. 23). Because of the importance of these elements, it seems ideal that academic institutions strive for a spot in the "center" of the Accountability Triangle, where they are accountable or serve each of these functions, yet surrender to none of them.

Another driving force of assessment is the 1988 federal mandate that directed all accrediting organizations that were approved by the U.S. Department of Education to include evidence of institutional outcomes, particularly those related to student learning, in their criteria for accreditation. This order affected all six regional accrediting associations and most professional/specialized accrediting bodies.

Regional and Disciplinary Accreditation

In order to ensure that colleges and universities provide education that meets acceptable levels of quality, they must go through an accreditation process. Accreditation is "a process of external quality review used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities, and educational programs for quality assurance and quality improvement" (CHEA, 2003, p. 1). It is the primary method by which the quality of higher education institutions and programs is assured throughout the country. Accreditation in the United States is carried out by three types of private, nonprofit organizations: regional, national, and specialized/professional. Regional accrediting associations operate in six different regions of the country and review entire institutions, whereas specialized and professional organizations accredit programs and some single-purpose institutions. National accreditors review entire institutions, many of which are single purpose institutions focused on a specific mission such as education in business and information technology. Accreditation through peer review is the principal method of quality assurance and improvement in higher education.

Accrediting organizations are recognized by the U.S. Department of Education (USDE) or the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) or both. Recognition is a review process that all accrediting organizations must go through to determine if their qualifications and activities meet the standards of USDE or CHEA. Both USDE and CHEA review the effectiveness of accreditation organizations, but each has a different primary function. The central purpose of USDE is to assure that federal student aid funds are being used toward the provision of quality courses and programs.

In order for an institution to be eligible for federal financial assistance for their students, it must be accredited by an accrediting organization that is recognized by USDE. The main function of CHEA, which is a private, nonprofit national organization that coordinates accreditation activity in the United States, is to assure and strengthen academic quality and ongoing quality improvement in courses, programs, and degrees. CHEA represents degree-granting colleges and universities and institutional and programmatic accrediting organizations including all six of the regional accrediting bodies (CHEA, 2003)

There are six regional accrediting associations, all recognized by USDE and CHEA, that accredit entire academic institutions, rather than single programs within them. While regional accreditors do not recognize individual academic programs, they do expect programs within their member institutions to regularly engage in assessment practices that produce programmatic change and improvement. These regional accrediting agencies have had a substantial impact on assessment in higher education as all six now require their member colleges and universities to collect and use learning assessment information for improvement (Palomba and Banta, 1999). Regional accrediting organizations do not specify how institutions must carry out assessment activities. Because they only make recommendations, faculty can choose from a variety of methods and instruments to assess student learning.

As of 2002, approximately 6,500 institutions and nearly 19,000 programs of higher education were accredited. Nearly 3,500 of these institutions were nationally accredited and just about 3,000 were regionally accredited (CHEA, 2003). A year later,

the number of institutions accredited by regional commissions rose to more than 3,500. Specialized accrediting organizations accredit professional programs within higher education institutions, which include (but are not limited to) business, computer sciences, engineering, medicine, art and design, teacher education, and disciplines in the social sciences including public affairs and administration (graduate-level only), journalism and mass communications, psychology (doctorate-level only), and social work. Criminal justice, however, is an area of the social sciences that is not subjected to accreditation.

A 2003 document produced by CHEA Institute for Research and Study of Accreditation and Quality Assurance indicated that there are many kinds of information that can service as suitable evidence of student learning outcomes in accreditation settings. Although this evidence can take many forms, it should involve "direct examination of student performance – either for individual students or for representative samples of students" (CHEA, 2003a, p. 5). The following examples are appropriate types of evidence that could be used for accreditation purposes (this list is not exclusive):

- Comprehensive or capstone examinations and assignments designed by faculty;
- Performance on licensing or other external examinations;
- Professionally judged performances or demonstrations of abilities in context;
- Portfolios of student work compiled over time; and
- Samples of representative student work generated in response to typical course assignments (CHEA, 2003a, p. 5).

Indirect methods of assessment, such as satisfaction surveys, focus groups, and interviews, are also beneficial in the accreditation process. These methods alone,

however, do not constitute direct evidence of student learning outcomes. Although the goals of assessment are typically broader than simply gathering direct evidence of student learning outcomes, any assessment program should include this feature.

In the 1980s, the language used in the regional accrediting standards emphasized a periodic, "externally applied superstructure of data gathering" to determine if goals had been met (Ewell, 2005, p. 116). Today, the language of the new standards centers on assignments and exercises embedded directly into the curriculum that can evaluate student performance as well as produce data about the performance of the entire institution. Ewell (2005) described the accreditation shift: "Rather than the existence of 'assessment' as a process being advanced as evidence of accountability, the alignment of the institution's actual teaching and learning with the established standards of performance on regular assignments becomes the stuff of accountability" (p. 116).

There has also been a dramatic change since the mid-1980s in accreditation standards regarding the type of evidence institutions could show to demonstrate that they were providing quality education. The number of library books, number of faculty holding doctorates, and amount of money spent on academic programs are examples of capacities that once served as sufficient evidence of institutional quality or effectiveness. The assumption was that learning would occur if these resources were in place. Today, however, although such capacities continue to be important factors in accreditation, having abundant resources alone does not warrant effective student learning.

The impetus for the change in accreditation language and evidence of institutional effectiveness was the 1988 executive order from then Secretary of Education William

Bennett that directed all federally-approved accrediting organizations to include evidence of institutional outcomes in their criteria for accreditation. More specifically, accrediting agencies are required to verify "that institutions or programs confer degrees only on those students who have demonstrated educational achievement as assessed and documented through appropriate measures (U.S. Department of Education, 1988, p. 25098 as cited in Banta, 2001). As a result of the potential loss of federal approval and financial support, all six regional accrediting associations and most disciplinary accreditors, began to incorporate a more concentrated focus on student learning outcomes and require their member colleges and universities, in some way, to collect and use learning assessment information for improvement purposes.

A decade later, the Higher Education Act was amended, giving "the force of law to the intent of the 1988 Executive Order" (Banta, 2001, p. 9). The Higher Education Act provides to strengthen the educational resources of our colleges and universities and to provide financial assistance to students in postsecondary and higher education. It authorizes most federal student aid grant and loan programs that provide more than $60 billion annually to students attending accredited colleges and universities in the country. Since its enactment in 1965, Congress has renewed the Higher Education Act approximately every six years to change and improve higher education policy. The most recent reauthorization, which occurred in 1998, has resulted in a major shift in the U.S. Department of Education's recognition process from focusing on minimum standards to assuring quality. More specifically, the Department of Education places an even greater emphasis on indicators of institutional effectiveness, particularly student achievement

toward learning outcomes, and requires accrediting organizations to follow these guidelines if they intend to be federally recognized. As a result, accreditors have stressed the importance of assessing student learning, which has become a significant accountability factor in the accreditation process (Wolff, 2005). While each accrediting body has taken its own approach to satisfy these mandates, all seem to agree on:

> Measuring what students are learning will continue to gain importance. By focusing on results, rather than counting heads and library books, the regionals say, they are holding colleges accountable while giving them the flexibility to experiment with new forms of education, such as Web-based courses or partnerships with for-profit institutions (McMurtrie, 2000, A30).

This emerging focus on student learning, according to the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (CRAC), has created new challenges for regional institutional accreditation. Instead of requiring "blind compliance to standardized learning goals," regional accrediting organizations have:

> ...promulgated quality standards which, in addition to assessing institutional capacity, also assess the congruence between an institution's mission and learning goals, its curricular offerings, and student learning outcomes. They also require institutions to use student learning data to enhance organizational self-reflection, and to show how they have used these data to improve their education programs. In essence, they ask institutions to be clear about their mission and educational purposes, and to demonstrate how well they are accomplishing these purposes (CRAC, 2003, p. 1).

This way, regional accreditation can focus on the quality of student learning without spelling out what learning should be, or in other words, can "promote *standards* without *standardization*" (CRAC, 2003, p. 1). In 2003, CRAC adopted two sets of principles governing the use of student learning data in regional institutional accreditation – one set

focuses on what a regional accrediting commission should reasonably expect of itself, and the other set deals with what a regional accrediting commission should reasonably expect of its institutional members. Both sets of principles include the *role of student learning in accreditation* as a reasonable expectation for an accrediting association and an accredited institution. One of the key purposes of both sets of principles is to demonstrate the shared commitment of student learning among all regional accrediting organizations. These principles are intended to emphasize and supplement existing standards of individual commissions, not replace them in any way.

Accredited Disciplines in the Social Sciences

As briefly mentioned in the previous section on regional and disciplinary accreditation, a few subjects in the social sciences are subjected to accreditation. The disciplines recognized in this section are psychology, social work, and journalism and mass communications. Each discipline, along with its respective accrediting agency, is briefly discussed.

The American Psychological Association (APA) is a specialized accrediting organization that is recognized by the U.S. Department of Education and the Council for Higher Education Accreditation. While APA's Committee on Accreditation reviews only doctoral and post-doctoral programs, and internships in psychology, its Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies produced a matrix describing optimal methods, as well as less preferred strategies, of assessing student learning in the major. The following are examples of two main categories and several related sub-categories identified as optimal methods of assessment for the individual learning goal to

demonstrate familiarity with the major concepts, theoretical perspectives, empirical findings, and historical trends in psychology:

- Classroom course data including objective tests, essay tests, and embedded questions and assignments; and
- Individual projects/performance assessment including written products, oral presentations, and structural/situational assessments (APA, 2002; APA, 2002a).

Another method, the capstone experience, was given an optimal rating in assessing a student's ability to understand and apply psychological principles to personal, social, and organizational issues. While there are numerous types of capstone experiences, APA maintained that "those that require enrollees to 'do the discipline' are probably the most effective way for a department to assess its student's ability to apply the psychological principles and methods they have acquired in their previous class work" (APA, 2002).

The last assessment strategy labeled as having optimal potential in the psychology major is the written product, which can be used to assess a student's ability to demonstrate information competence and use a computer and other technology for many purposes. Written projects provide an ideal context in which the faculty can assess research generation, information evaluation, and technology skills (APA, 2002).

In addition to using self-assessment/reflection methods to assess personal development skills, the previous examples are the only main categories of assessment methods that were rated as optimal when assessing any of the learning goals presented in the matrix. There are, however, many assessment strategies identified as having a strong

potential of successfully assessing learning objectives in psychology. A few of these are provided:

- Research methods in psychology – Research projects (writing, interpretation, and presentation of research findings); capstone experiences; portfolios; employer satisfaction surveys; and performance reviews

- Critical thinking skills in psychology – Essay tests; embedded questions and assignments; oral presentations; graphic displays; role-playing exercises; capstone experiences; portfolios; and group projects

- Applications of psychology – written assignments; oral presentations; simulations; internships; self-assessment; research teams; performance reviews; and focus groups (APA, 2002; APA, 2002a).

In contrast, the Task Force on Undergraduate Psychology Major Competencies rated the following assessment methods as having poor or limited potential of being able to adequately assess student learning of the learning goals just mentioned:

- Research methods in psychology – Internships; case studies; self-critiques; interviews; and focus groups

- Critical thinking skills in psychology – Objective tests; locally-developed tests; internships; case studies; self-critiques; satisfaction surveys; performance reviews; exit interviews; and focus groups

- Applications of psychology – Objective tests; graphic tests and displays; standardized tests; locally-developed tests; and alumni interviews (APA, 2002; APA, 2002a).

The Council on Social Work Education (CSWE) is a specialized accrediting organization recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (formerly recognized by the Department of Education) that accredits bachelor's and master's degree programs in social work. Programs accredited by CSWE are required to follow criteria outlined in the *Educational Policy and Accreditation Standards*, a document that

"specifies the curricular content and educational context to prepare students for professional social work practice" (CSWE, 2004, p. 2). The social work accreditation standards do not specify assessment techniques, but do recommend 12 program objectives that are essential to the practice of any social worker. While social work programs can add to the list, these are the fundamental components that constitute the professional foundation of social work. Some of these learning outcomes are related to critical thinking skills, values and ethics, history and issues of social work, application of social work knowledge and skills, theoretical frameworks, social policies, research and evaluation, self-evaluation, and communication skills (CSWE, 2004).

The Accrediting Council on Education in Journalism and Mass Communications (ACEJMC), also recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (formerly recognized by the Department of Education), is the agency responsible for evaluating professional journalism and mass communications programs in colleges and universities. The most recently revised set of ACEJMC Accrediting Standards consist of nine standards, two of which deal with curriculum and instruction and the assessment of learning outcomes. Under the curriculum and instruction standard, 11 professional values and competencies are listed. While ACEJMC does not require specific curricula, courses, or methods or instruction, it requires that all graduates, regardless of their specialization (advertising, newspaper or magazine journalism, photojournalism, public relations, or radio and television broadcasting), should be aware of certain core values and competencies. Some of these include understanding and application of the principles and laws of freedom of speech and press, history and role of professionals and

institutions in shaping communications, diversity, ethics, critical thinking, research and evaluation, writing, self-evaluation, numerical and statistical concepts, and communications tools and technologies.

Each standard concludes with a list of various forms of evidence that a program should include in its self-study report to demonstrate that it meets expectations. The assessment of learning outcomes standard requires that each journalism and mass communications program regularly assesses student learning and uses results to improve curriculum and instruction. Because one of the indicators of this standard is that the social work program maintains contact with its alumni to assess their experiences and gain feedback for improvement, one form of evidence of student learning that is recommended is an alumni survey. Other types of evidence that students are achieving learning goals are outlined in this standard as well. They can be used to assess student learning in a professional graduate program: professional project, thesis, and comprehensive exam that demonstrates that graduate students have developed analytical and critical thinking abilities appropriate to the profession. The list of evidence for each standard is only a guide to possible forms of evidence (ACEJMC, 2004).

Although criminal justice lacks a formal accreditation process that is common in other professional disciplines, some type of continuing self-assessment is typically required through university mandates (Kelley, 2004). The Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) has created certification standards that supplement the regional accreditation process by providing guidance for the internal and external evaluation of criminal justice programs. The goal of the ACJS Certification Standards, which are

available for associate, baccalaureate, and master's degree programs, is to measurably improve the quality of criminal justice education (ACJS, 2005). While there is a great deal of flexibility in what ACJS will allow in terms of student learning assessment plans, it is clear that ACJS expects programs seeking certification to be able to prove that students learn. To illustrate, Section H of the ACJS Certification Standards is reprinted in Figure 1. As shown in Figure 1, program quality and effectiveness is a major component of the certification process as it is one of nine sections of the Certification Standards. One of the selected indicators of this section requires that criminal justice programs provide evidence that they are achieving their mission, goals, objectives, and outcomes, indicating that evidence of student learning is highly important in becoming certified.

The remaining sections of this chapter focus on the current state of assessment in higher education, in the social sciences, and in criminal justice.

Figure 1
ACJS Certification Standards, Section H

Section H: Program Quality and Effectiveness

Standards:

H.1 The program undergoes systematic evaluation of all program components and uses the results for program improvement

H.2 The program demonstrates that its graduates have acquired the knowledge and developed the skills that are identified as the program's objectives and student learning outcomes.

H.3 The program demonstrates that students completing courses in non-traditional time periods and modalities, in different divisions, and at satellite or branch campuses acquire levels of knowledge, understanding, and competencies comparable to those expected in similar programs offered in more traditional time periods, modalities and locations.

H.4 The institution periodically reviews the program under established, clearly defined institutional policies and uses the results to improve student learning and program effectiveness. The review includes an assessment of effectiveness, currency, and continued need.

Selected Indicators:

I-H.a. Written program assessment plan [H.1]

I-H.b. Indication of where program objectives are taught in curriculum, how learning outcomes are measured prior to graduation, and the results of such assessment [H.2]

I-H.c. Evidence demonstrating that the program is achieving its mission, goals, objectives and outcomes [H.2]

I-H.d. Results of program evaluation including graduate satisfaction with program, employer satisfaction with graduates; retention and graduation rates; placement rates [H.2]

I-H.e. Analysis of student evaluations of teaching [H.3]

I-H.f. Evidence that students completing courses in non-traditional time periods and modalities, in different divisions, and at satellite or branch campuses acquire levels of knowledge, understanding, and competencies comparable to those expected in similar programs offered in more traditional time periods, modalities and locations [H.3]

I-H.g. Reports from institution's program reviews, indicating cycle of reviews, findings, and related program improvements [H.4]

Other Supporting Material:
I-H.h. Institution's policy on academic program review [H.4]
I-H.i. Institution's program assessment policy [H.4]

Source: ACJS website, www.acjs.org; Standards approved May 2, 2005 and amended October 28, 2005.

Current State of Assessment in Higher Education

In 1989, the Commission on Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA), one of the six regional accrediting organizations, introduced its Assessment Initiative. More than a decade later, the Commission has learned that "it is not easy to gain universal acceptance of the efficacy of assessing student learning" (Lopez, 1999, p. 5). Through its Assessment Initiative, the Commission found that the number of its member institutions that are actually using the results of assessment to improve the level of student learning in each academic program is still relatively small. Regardless, the Commission has been successful in spreading the word about the importance of student learning assessment, increasing the number of institutions familiar with the process, and accomplishing "a shift in the accreditation paradigm from one that emphasized evaluating institutional inputs to one focused on assessing student outcomes." This change in the accreditation model allows colleges and universities "to keep pace with the profound social and technological transformations higher education is undergoing, while improving educational quality" (Lopez, 1999, p. 6).

Despite the documented success of the Assessment Initiative, the fact remains, however, that the full implementation of assessment is often delayed or even prevented on a considerable number of campuses. After reviewing almost 1,000 colleges and universities accredited by NCA, Lopez (1999) identified eight major reasons for their slow progress on assessment:

- Difficulties in involving faculty and students in assessment;

- Difficulties in developing program goals and measurable objectives;
- Difficulties in selecting or developing direct and indirect measures aligned with program goals and measurable objectives;
- Difficulties in collecting and interpreting data;
- Difficulties in disseminating assessment data and information because of insufficient or incomplete feedback loops;
- Difficulties in obtaining or reallocating the funds needed for assessment activities;
- Difficulties in linking the assessment processes with operational planning and annual budgeting processes; and
- Difficulties in understanding and providing for the collaborative roles of academic administrators and faculty (p. 8).

While most of these categories deal directly with faculty and staff, a majority of these individuals are not equipped to start conducting a routine assessment of student learning without proper training. Fortunately, more and more campus administrators are recognizing the need for ongoing faculty development when it comes to assessment. There are a number of resources that institutions can make available to their programs in developing and implementing learning assessment programs. Some institutions have established assessment offices/committees on campus, created on- and off-campus programs that assist in developing and implementing assessment programs, and executed "campus-wide efforts to study and document student learning outcomes" (Haworth, 1996, p. 1). Others offer course release time and/or financial compensation to faculty members who are involved in substantial assessment efforts. In return, these faculty and staff typically must agree to share with peers what they have learned about assessment and

instructional design. Teachers who provide student-centered instruction, said Allen (2004), must take advantage of the resources made available on and off campus in order to facilitate and improve learning. While the method of faculty development support that is ultimately chosen depends on the institution, particularly the amount of resources available to fund assessment-related endeavors, Lopez (1999) found that a strong assessment committee plays a significant role in the development of effective assessment programs.

As early as the mid-1980s, surveys were being administered to colleges and universities throughout the country to determine the state of assessment in higher education, specifically to see how many institutions were actually involved in outcomes assessment. The American Council on Education's annual *Campus Trends* survey of college and university provosts revealed that by 1989, nearly 70 percent of institutions in the nation had assessment activities under way (El-Khawas, 1989 as cited in Palomba and Banta, 1999). A survey conducted by the Nelson A. Rockefeller Institute of Government, however, implied that actual implementation of assessment activities was much less prevalent. In the fall of 1987, the Rockefeller survey was sent to chief finance officers of public four-year colleges and universities in California, Florida, Massachusetts, New York, Texas, and Wisconsin (the largest educational systems in the United States). Of the 98 institutions that replied, only 22 percent felt that their assessment program was extensive, leaving 63 percent that said their assessment program was limited, and six percent had no assessment activity at all (Burke, 1998a).

A few years later in 1992, 92 percent of campuses were reportedly involved in assessment, but more than half agreed that the only thing these activities had resulted in was additional reporting requirements (El-Khawas, 1992 as cited in Ewell, 1993). By 1995, which is the most recent year for which results from the *Campus Trends* survey could be found, assessment still appeared to be running rampant as "more than 90 percent of institutions in the United States were conducting assessment initiatives or planning to do so" (El-Khawas, 1995 as cited in Banta, 2001, p. 7). While these studies did not indicate a specific type of assessment, other studies conducted during this time period specifically discovered that "student outcomes assessment" was taking place in institutions much less frequently. Separate 1991 studies indicated that student outcomes assessment was being conducted in only 25 to 30 percent of institutions responding nationwide. A 1993 report confirmed this by revealing that 43 percent of institutions throughout the nation were involved in extensive learning assessment activities (Nichols, 1995). As demonstrated by numerous survey results, albeit a little outdated, the portrayal of assessment in higher education is somewhat cloudy. Some data implied that assessment was taking place on the vast majority of college campuses, while others uncovered a much smaller percentage of institutions that were involved.

An article in *Assessment Update* cited a more recent survey that was conducted concerning performance budgeting and funding, an incentive-based funding initiative for public higher education that financially rewards exemplary institutional performance on selected measures of effectiveness. Results from this 1998 survey of state higher education finance officers revealed that performance, particularly in the area of student

learning, was linked to budgeting for public institutions in 21 out of the 50 states (42%), and that this figure was likely to increase to 31 states (62%) by 2003 (Burke, 1998 as cited in Banta, 2001). Two of the states that participate in this type of funding are Tennessee and Missouri. College campuses in each of these states can earn additional funding by providing proof of successful performance on selected measures of student learning and overall institutional effectiveness. In fact, in 1979, Tennessee became the first state to base a portion of state funding for its public colleges and universities on the assessment of student competence. While each campus in both states can choose the test that students must take in general education and in their major, a nationally-normed test must be used if one is available. Despite the results, test scores do not prevent individual students from graduating. Colleges and universities in these states will, however, receive additional funding for instruction if their cumulative test scores are above the national average on standardized exams or if they can demonstrate continuous improvement on locally-developed tests (Banta, 2001; Miller, 2001).

By the early 1990s, over two-thirds of the states required some form of assessment in their colleges and universities (Bogue and Hall, 2003), and by the late 1990s, all but six states had adopted formal assessment policies for their institutions of higher education to implement (Nettles et al., 1997). Several states, including Florida, Texas, Georgia, Tennessee, South Dakota, Arkansas, Wisconsin, Missouri, Utah, and New Jersey, have mandated standardized exit exams in an attempt "to measure a minimum level of knowledge or mastery in a field or basic competency in skills like math and writing" (Hosch, 2005, p. 3). Additionally, the State University of New York

system's (SUNY) Board of Trustees recently approved a systemwide test to measure proficiencies of graduates. Beginning in the fall of 2006, all of SUNY's 64 two- and four-year campuses will be required to test 20 percent of their students every three years to measure writing, critical thinking, and quantitative skills (Hebel, 2004).

While the number of states that require the use of standardized tests is relatively small, many colleges and universities are affected by these mandates. So do these standardized exams serve as effective means of assessing student competencies? As the debate surrounding standardized testing in higher education still remains prevalent, there is no definitive response to this question. Hosch (2005) did argue, however, that since 1972 when the Regents' Testing Program was established for the University System of Georgia, "there is little evidence that demonstrates the quality of higher education in Georgia or the skill levels of the state's graduates have improved" (p. 4).

In addition to statewide consideration, there is also a major discussion currently taking place in federal government concerning standardized testing in higher education. Last fall, the Secretary of Education appointed the Commission on the Future of Higher Education to examine whether standardized tests should be used in colleges and universities to "prove that students are learning and to allow easier comparison on quality" (Arenson, 2006, p. 1). The chairman of the commission hopes that other commission members can agree that students are supposed to be learning skills like writing, critical thinking, and problem solving. Reactions to the announcement have been anything but unanimous. Some business executives, test-makers, and members of the commission support standardization as a way for institutions to show what they are

achieving and to improve student learning. One of these supporters is the chairman of the commission who said that public reporting of student learning in higher education as measured through standardized testing "would be greatly beneficial to the students, parents, taxpayers, and employers" (Arenson, 2006, p. 1).

Others, however, particularly university faculty and individuals associated with higher education interest groups, strongly oppose using standardized tests to measure student learning. The president of the National Association of Independent Colleges and Universities, a group that represents private, nonprofit colleges and universities, said, "What we oppose is a single, national, high-stakes, one-size-fits-all, uber-outcome exam. The notion of a single exam implies there are national standards, and that implies a national curriculum. Then we are on the way to a centralized Prussian education system" (Arenson, 2006, p. 2). The lack of student motivation in standardized testing was once again voiced (as it was earlier in the chapter) by Peter Ewell, a testing expert at the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems in Colorado. Ewell, also a renowned assessment scholar, argued that measuring student learning through tests is difficult, and unless tests are embedded in the curriculum, there is no incentive for students to take tests seriously or do their best. The commission has until August 2006 to report on issues that include accountability, cost, and quality in higher education (Arenson, 2006).

Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings affirmed that part of the demand for accountability in higher education is money. The federal government funds about one-third of the higher education system's annual investment, yet officials are uncertain about

what they are getting in return. Additionally, the most recent findings from the National Assessment of Adult Literacy given by the U.S. Department of Education in 2003 indicated that less than a third of college graduates were regarded as proficient in terms of literacy as defined by the ability to read and comprehend complex, lengthy texts. Both of these factors sparked the creation of the Bush administration's newest higher education commission (Arenson, 2006).

Another nationwide initiative is the national "report card" on higher education that comes out every two years. Since 2000, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education (NCPPHE) has produced a state-by-state report card on higher education performance called *Measuring Up*. In the 2000 and 2002 editions of *Measuring Up*, all 50 states received an "incomplete" in the category of learning because there are no comprehensive national data available that would allow for meaningful comparisons across states. For the first time, however, *Measuring Up 2004* gave a "plus" in learning to Illinois, Kentucky, Nevada, Oklahoma, and South Carolina, five states that have developed comparable learning measures through their successful participation in the National Forum on College-Level Learning. Funded by the Pew Charitable Trusts, this five-state demonstration project is the first attempt to measure what college-educated people know and can do in a comparable way across the states (NCPPHE, 2004). According to Miller and Ewell (2005), the director and consultant of the Forum, respectively, "It is feasible to extend this approach to other states and eventually to create a nationwide benchmark for learning" (p. 5). While the project team members experienced challenges in "the logistics of administering tests, institutional commitment

and preparation, and student motivation to participate," Miller and Ewell were confident that these barriers could be defeated as they are typical of a pilot effort of this kind (p. 5).

All of the discussion about more quality and accountability in higher education through assessment has unsurprisingly led to the notion of rising costs for states, students, and the taxpaying public, who are key fiscal contributors to the successful operation of public colleges and universities. To make fiscal matters worse, the February 2006 *Policy Alert* of the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education updated several reports on state shortfalls, and made the projection that, despite recent economics gains and the fact that most state budgets for 2006 have improved, all 50 states face potential budget deficits that will limit the funding of higher education through the year 2013. According to the study, the growing demand for other services, such as K-12 education, social services, corrections, and especially Medicaid, will surpass the demand for higher education. More specifically, "The rapidly escalating costs of Medicaid, more than anything else, explain why total state and local spending is projected to grow faster than spending for higher education" (Jones, 2006, p. 2). This growing demand for state services other than higher education will result in increased competition for the remaining resources, proving further difficulty for higher education to receive adequate state funding.

About eight months prior, however, the June 2005 *Policy Alert* focused on ways to improve student learning *and* reduce costs in higher education. Historically, there has been a familiar trade-off between cost and quality – improving quality or increasing access usually has meant raising costs, and cutting costs has often meant a decrease in

quality, access, or both. To enhance student learning, many colleges and universities have come up with new ways of using information technology, yet this just adds to the problems of rising costs. In response, the National Center for Academic Transformation (NCAT) has created a method to redesign introductory courses with large enrollment numbers in an effort to improve the quality of student learning, increase retention, and reduce the costs of instruction. Large introductory courses are being targeted "because undergraduate enrollments in the United States concentrate in only a few academic areas. In fact, just 25 courses generate about 50 percent of student enrollment at the community college level and about 35 percent of enrollment at the baccalaureate level" (Twigg, 2005, p. 2). An institution that can make improvements in a limited number of large-enrollment courses, then it has a greater opportunity to affect more students. After partnering with 30 colleges and universities in all regions of the country, NCAT has demonstrated that it is possible to improve quality and reduce costs in higher education by using information technology. Some of the significant findings included:

- 25 out of 30 projects showed a significant increase in student learning;
- 18 of 24 projects reported a decrease in drop/failure/withdrawal rates and an increase in course completion rates; and
- All institutions reduced costs by an average of 37 percent and produced a collective annual savings of about $3 million (Twigg, 2005, p. 1).

Assessment in higher education is most often described as a process involving faculty and students, but it is meaningful only if the results are carefully considered and discussed with administrators and others who are invested in the assessment process. For one single-campus community college located in Illinois, it is important not only to

communicate the assessment results, but to also find out what administrators, faculty, staff, and the public think about the findings, and then "closing-the-loop" by "providing feedback on that feedback" (Klassen and Watson, 2001, p. 48). These responses are summarized and anonymously published, which leads to more discussion about the efforts and results of assessment on this campus. In addition to clearly communicating the results, they must be utilized to make changes that will eventually lead to improved learning and teaching.

Improvements made to the curriculum and the methods in which courses are delivered should be based on the needs of the students. According to Suskie (2004), making good use of assessment results is the most important step in the process, and can often be the most difficult. Getting faculty and staff to reach a consensus about the meaning of assessment results and what changes should be made to their instruction is often a tremendous undertaking, as sometimes is the entire process.

Assessment in the Social Sciences

There are only a few disciplines in the social sciences that have enriched the literature with significant evidence of assessment initiatives. One of these subjects is social work, a professional accredited field that, along with others like nursing and medicine, is considered to be one of the early adopters of outcomes assessment at colleges and universities across the country. Results from a 2004 study revealed that by 2001, approximately 30 percent of baccalaureate social work programs nationwide were using the Baccalaureate Education Assessment Package (BEAP), an assessment tool intended to assist undergraduate social work programs with accreditation standards and

provide a national database for comparative purposes. The BEAP includes six instruments for student, graduate, and employer feedback that is intended to help social work programs answer five major research questions:

1. Are social work education programs delivering what they say they are?
2. Are institutions delivering the program to whom they say they are?
3. What are student and alumni perceptions the program process and climate?
4. Do students' values change during the process of their education in the major as measured by the Social Work Values Inventory (a scale that measures confidentiality, self-determination, and social justice, three of the major values cited in the National Social Workers' Code of Ethics)?
5. How do program graduates fare in the employment market, and do they seek additional education, licensing, and professional development? (Buchan et al., 2004, p. 245).

Although there are several limitations of the BEAP listed in the article (difficulty in tracking students throughout their educational experience, difficulty with contacting alumni, and low employer feedback), authors confirmed that the assessment package includes many of the characteristics that have been associated with good assessment practices. It "can help programs address multiple evaluation questions and thereby assist programs in making informed decisions on both curricular and programmatic issues" (Buchan et al., 2004, p. 251). It is important to note that even though the BEAP instruments provide a strong baseline for undergraduate social work programs, additional measures, especially those related to direct practice skills, should be used in conjunction with them (Buchan et al., 2004).

Another assessment measure in social work education, the Social Work Self-Efficacy Scale (SWSE), has been developed in the last several years to assess a key aspect of student performance – self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, in this case, refers to how confident students believe they are in their ability to perform social work tasks. It is a central concept in social work that has appeared regularly in the social work literature. The SWSE is a 52-item scale that that asks students to indicate how confident they are in a number of areas including, practice skills, fieldwork, human behavior, social environment, policy, research, therapeutic techniques, case management, client support, and treatment planning/evaluation (Holden et al., 2002).

The SWSE, which takes about 15 minutes to complete, is a pretest/posttest design that was administered to 173 entering students and 322 graduating students in the spring of 1999, and then given again to 220 entering students and 328 graduating students in the spring of 2000. Results from this study indicated that these cohorts, which consisted of graduate students from the Ehrenkranz School of Social Work at New York University, experienced statistically significant increases in self-efficacy during their social work education. Although these findings stem from indirect measures, which are often criticized when used as data collection methods in assessment, authors suggested that the SWSE could serve as a new and effective approach to outcomes assessment in social work education (Holden et al., 2002).

Psychology is another field that appears to have somewhat of a firm grasp on assessment. In his 1995 compilation of assessment case studies, Nichols provided many examples of institutions using results from assessment activities to improve their

respective curricula in various disciplines including social sciences. For example, through the use of an alumni survey, the Psychology Department at Clemson University found that students needed more hands-on advising and information regarding career opportunities. Consequently, the department developed a handbook that addresses career opportunities for all psychology majors and formed peer advising services for freshman and sophomore psychology students that help make advising more participative.

Another psychology case study was cited a year later in a book written by Banta, Lund, Black, and Oblander (1996) that focused on assessment activities and actions taken as a result of such activities in numerous areas of education including the social sciences. In an effort to gain feedback from students about its strong and weak parts and ultimately improve its effectiveness, the psychology program at the University of Montevallo started to have its seniors answer five open-ended questions. One of the suggestions resulted in the formation of the Psychology Student Advisory Council, giving students a consistent voice about what goes on in the program. After the Council of 11 students routinely met to discuss ways to improve the program, it recommended that in addition to the one three-hour research course available, there should be another three hours of supervised research added to the curriculum. Most students engaged in research were spending at least a year on their projects and typically go on to graduate school. In the spring of 2003, a second research course was introduced so that students can now enroll in Research I and Research II. This gives those students interested in a master's degree an opportunity to "show research credit that more accurately reflected their efforts" (Banta et al., 1996, p. 133).

Previously mentioned in this chapter are the Educational Testing Service's (ETS) Major Field Tests that are designed to measure the basic knowledge and understanding achieved by senior undergraduates in their major field of study. The multiple-choice exam is often given in a capstone course or in the last semester of study. There are 16 subject areas in which Major Field Tests can be administered, nearly half of which are related to the social sciences. The following list consists of these social science disciplines and the most recently published number of institutions that have used the Major Field Tests as an end-of-program outcomes assessment tool in each field, as shown on the ETS website:

- Criminal Justice – 40 institutions (from 2/2005 to 2/2006)
- Economics – 65 institutions (from 2/2003 to 7/2005)
- Education – 23 institutions (from 2/2003 to 7/2005)
- History – 132 institutions (from 2/2003 to 7/2005)
- Political Science – 98 institutions (from 2/2005 to 2/2006)
- Psychology – 150 institutions (from 2/2005 to 2/2006)
- Sociology – 141 institutions (from 2/2001 to 6/2004).

Other disciplines that employ Major Field Tests include biology, business, chemistry, computer science, literature in English, mathematics, music, physics, and master's in business administration. Combined, more than 700 colleges and universities utilize these standardized exams to assess student learning outcomes in these 16 fields of study (ETS, 2006).

One of the institutions that uses the Major Field Test in psychology is James Madison University. A 2002 study found that student performance on this test was strongly correlated with other measures of academic success such as SAT scores and grade point average (Stoloff and Feeney, 2002). No evidence was found, however, that these standardized exams are tools that effectively assess student learning. Portfolios, on the other hand, were characterized in another 2002 study as instruments that allow students in social work education to develop their critical thinking skills – skills that students need in order to become competent social workers (Coleman et al., 2002).

More examples of assessment in the social sciences come from political science and sociology programs. The Sophomore-Junior Diagnostic Projects at King's College provide opportunities for both faculty and students to determine whether the first and second years of the curriculum are helping students to achieve the goals of the major, and are implemented in several departments including political science, English, mathematics, computer science, and human resources management. The Sophomore-Junior Diagnostic Project in Political Science, which is assigned as a requirement in the Public Administration course, requires students to submit a written analysis of the influence of a professional government group and, as well as participate in a panel discussion where students must be prepared to address questions posed by faculty and other political science majors. Department faculty compare the students' oral and written work to their performance in other major courses and their required self-assessments to make decisions and take action regarding student learning. The most common problems identified among political science majors through the use of the Sophomore-Junior

Diagnostic Project are associated with writing deficiencies. As a result, students are referred to the campus writing center where their problems are more specifically diagnosed and instruction is given to improve their writing skills. Over the past decade, this assessment project has encouraged discussion among political science faculty about what students should accomplish in the major, how that will be assessed, and indications for needed change in the major curriculum (Banta et al., 1996).

Learning in the social sciences is often based on rote memorization rather than analysis and application, which can hinder rather than encourage learning. One of the particular drawbacks of learning in the social sciences, according to Courts and McInerney (1993), is that "novices tend to focus on the surface features of texts, written and oral, rather than learn to see the world through the lenses and perspectives of these disciplines" (p. 136). These authors suggested that writing exercises will help students to more actively engage themselves in quality classroom discussions and overall comprehension of the subject or particular lesson being examined. For example, a professor of an introductory sociology course who wanted to improve class discussions began assigning students one-to-two page writings related to topics in the text. These short writing assignments transformed the minimal class discussions of assigned chapters into productive, engaging interactions between students and teacher (Courts and McInerney, 1993).

In order to meet a mandate set by the State University of New York (SUNY) that every campus assess its major programs, the faculty and students at SUNY Buffalo met regularly for one year to discuss the mission, goals, and objectives of the sociology

program. Eventually these discussions resulted in consensus regarding mission statements, learning goals and objectives, and several strategies to assess student performance and achievement toward these goals and objectives. One of these assessment activities was designed to measure the abilities of sociology majors' to apply sociological knowledge to a work or real-world situation. More specifically, the focal point of this assessment project was the department's internship program.

Undergraduate sociology students must complete two internships, keep a journal that documents their responsibilities and experiences, and, at the end of the semester in which they complete their internship, submit a ten- to fifteen-page paper on a topic specific to their internship observations and learning. As with political science and many other disciplines, general writing skills were identified as deficiencies among students, although they were not part of a specific departmental objective. Another finding, which was more surprising to faculty and administrators, concluded that as students consistently complained about their troubles with the required research and statistics courses, they demonstrated greater understanding in these areas than in other required areas such as social theory. However, because very few if any complaints were ever made about theory, it received insufficient attention while the department constantly struggled over the research and statistics requirements. Two curricular changes occurred as a result of this particular assessment activity:

> First, course sequencing is being examined in light of the results. Currently, students are advised that they must begin taking the research/statistics sequence in their junior year, but there is no similar directive regarding theory. Also, there is currently no sequencing of theory courses with the internships. It is thought that some of the deficiencies that

> were noticed especially in the area of theoretical understanding were due to a lack of course sequencing. If students are to make the most of their internship experiences, perhaps a tighter sequencing of courses is necessary.
>
> Second, a possible restructuring of the internship program is being considered. Various options are being investigated, such as requiring several written activities throughout the semester rather than one single paper at the end. This would result in better feedback on writing skills as well as sociological applications. Also, ordering the first and second internships so that the learning experiences build on each other in a more concrete sequence is being considered (Banta et al., 1996, p. 140).

Assessment in general education appears to be taking place on a large number of college campuses. A significant number of case studies have been conducted that involved colleges and universities that assess students' generic knowledge and skills. According to Banta et al. (1996), "Knowledge of basic concepts in the fine arts, humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences is fundamental to a deeper understanding of any field. Similarly, one cannot move to an advance level in a discipline without mastering at some level the skills of reading, writing, listening, speaking, calculating, computing, analyzing, synthesizing, applying, and evaluating" (p. 155). While these competencies are clearly important and essential to a successful college experience, it is often difficult to prove that students developed them in general education courses, avowed Banta and associates (1993). Instead of the general education curriculum making a difference, it could be courses in other disciplines or a variety of other sources that improve a student's proficiencies in these areas.

In order to adequately assessment general education programs, faculty need to make certain that it is their courses and instruction that are positively affecting student

learning in the intended subjects. In fact, one case study conducted in 2002 at an American university found that designing and implementing assessment activities in general education "is more challenging than assessing other program[s] in post-secondary settings because it is influenced by more internal and external constituencies than any other assessment process" (Stone and Friedman, 2002, Abstract). On the other hand, Banta et al. (1996) provided case studies of over 20 institutions that have had success in assessing student achievement in general education.

In this same 1996 publication, Trudy Banta and other educators "assembled 165 case studies based on some of the best assessment taking place at campuses across the country" (p. 343). Surprisingly, however, only a small number of these cases contained concrete evidence that student performance had actually improved as a result of assessment. A description of one of these cases is presented:

> Perhaps the most unusual and tangible evidence of the benefits to students that assessment can convey comes from the College of Business at Ball State University. Employers play an important role in determining students' grades in the course New Venture Creation by indicating which student proposals for new businesses have the best chance for success. In a few cases, the employer-assessors have been so impressed with the ideas presented for a new venture that they have been willing to invest money to get it started (p. 344).

While Banta claimed that only a small number of campuses are reporting on learning outcomes in ways that will meet the demands of parents, state officials, and accreditors, she also alleged that assessment has yielded outstanding returns for students, and that assessment has indeed made a difference.

Among all of the campus case studies, including the ones that do not pertain to the social sciences and not addressed here, lack of faculty and staff commitment or trust was a consistent challenge across all disciplines. In fact, it was the most frequently reported obstacle in implementing assessment results in the 1995 case studies. Palomba and Banta (2001) also conducted a number of assessment case studies at institutions that house accredited disciplines. While none of them are presented here (as none pertained to social sciences with the exception of social work), authors pointed out that the engagement and commitment of faculty in the assessment process was a constant struggle. In order for successful implementation of assessment results, institutions must have buy-in among all faculty and staff, and most importantly, have the support of senior administrators.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, two studies have been conducted over the past several years to determine how political science and public relations programs in colleges and universities are conducting student learning outcomes assessment. These were the only studies found that described what social science programs as a whole rather than in individual institutions were doing in assessment. In June 2000, Kelly and Klunk mailed a survey to 1,253 political science departments in colleges and universities across the country to develop a comprehensive understanding of student learning assessment in this particular social science discipline. With a return rate near 17 percent, almost 40 percent of respondents had adopted a set of learning objectives and approximately 14 percent were reviewing a previously adopted set of learning objectives, leaving about 45 percent of departments that had not yet formally adopted any learning objectives. Over

half of the responding departments had adopted the following learning objectives in rank order: writing skills (57.1%), critical thinking (55.7%), and familiarity with major theories and analytical approaches in political science (54%). These were the only three objectives that were formally adopted by a majority of the departments.

Another section of the five-part survey focused on assessment instruments used to measure student achievement toward established learning objectives. Over 31 percent of departments indicated that they were not yet in the formulation stage of establishing learning assessment tools. Of those respondents that had formulated and adopted an assessment instrument(s), the senior capstone course was used by the largest percentage of them (39.6%), with faculty observations (25%) and exit interviews (24.1%) as the second and third most often used assessment techniques. On the contrary, only ten percent of the political science departments that responded to the questionnaire used the pretest/posttest to assess student learning (Kelly and Klunk, 2003).

A 1999 international survey of 156 educators in undergraduate and graduate public relations programs found that 43 percent of educators had a plan in place at their institution to assess student learning, but just over half (56.3%) of those assessment plans had actually been used to collect data. Thus, less than one-quarter (23.9%) of the programs have assessed learning outcomes and used the results to make changes in the major to improve student learning. Similarly, the study found that less that one-quarter (22.7%) of the 97 public relations practitioners who were also surveyed have been asked to participate in assessment activities pertaining to students in the major. Survey results also indicated that more than three-quarters (77.6%) of public relations educators who

were surveyed used grades in major coursework to assess student learning. Authors find this result troubling: "Unless a grade can be deconstructed to reflect students' attainment of various course objectives, it is an exceptionally blunt assessment instrument that fails to provide independent confirmation of any outcome being attained" (Rybacki and Lattimore, 1999, p. 69). Additionally, 72 percent used a capstone experience, such as an internship to assess student learning, and exactly half of the respondents used a simulation or case study analysis.

As part of the survey process, public relations educators and practitioners were also asked to rate a selection of assessment instruments. On a seven-point scale, both groups rated internships and practicum the highest with only a slight difference. Both educators and practitioners also assigned high values to portfolio reviews, although practitioners perceived there to be much greater value in their involvement in this form of assessment rather than their faculty counterparts. At the other end of the spectrum, the least favored assessment tool among both groups was the standardized written graduation exams. In summary, capstone experiences (such as internships and practicum), simulation or case study analysis, and surveys of alumni satisfaction surveys were all commonly used by both practitioners and educators in spite of their difference of opinions concerning these methods of assessment. Although utilized by less than 20 percent of respondents, both public relations educators and practitioners also assigned great value to surveys of employer satisfaction (Rybacki and Lattimore, 1999).

To satisfy the primary goal of this research, the results from the criminal justice learning assessment survey, which will provide a baseline understanding about how

criminal justice programs are assessing student learning, will be compared to the findings reported in the political science and public relations studies just described. (This comparison is included in Chapter 4.) In addition to identifying specific assessment techniques being used in criminal justice programs, this research project, like the public relations study but unlike the political science study, will also rate the effectiveness of each instrument. (This information is also presented in Chapter 4.)

In addition to the analysis of public relations faculty and practitioners, the only other study found that included both the type and effectiveness of instruments being used to assess student learning across an entire discipline (rather than a single program or university) focused on business schools in the United States. Based on the 573 survey responses (19 percent return rate) from business school faculty, the most frequently used assessment method was a case study/problem assignment, which was also perceived to be the most effective technique for measuring student learning. Other commonly used instruments, including observation of student process and item analysis of multiple-choice questions, were also considered to have moderate-to-strong effectiveness by a majority of the respondents. These three assessment instruments were often used to determine student grades because they measure the most important learning outcomes of content acquisition, application, and practice. They are difficult to use in overall assessment, however, because "they do not incorporate a pretest/posttest format, which is necessary for determining whether there was value added to a student's learning" (Michlitsch and Sidle, 2002, p. 129). These particular results will not be directly compared to the criminal justice survey data because business is a discipline that is not

typically considered a social science, and the goal of this research is to provide information about student learning assessment in the social sciences.

Assessment in Criminal Justice

Criminal justice is a relatively new academic discipline that has recently "come of age" (Clear, 2001). Experts in this field agree that criminal justice deserves consistent review not only at the institutional level, but also at the national level for comparative purposes (Southerland, 2002). Unfortunately, there are no nationwide data available that describe the current state of criminal justice programs as it relates to student learning assessment, which is an integral part of the overall quality review process. In fact, Tontodonato (2006) insisted, "A review of the scholarly literature indicates that, relatively speaking, little has been published on assessment in criminal justice..." (p. 163). Most work in the area of assessment is being circulated in the field of higher education in general. Also, much of the information about the general and discipline-specific assessment initiatives being developed and implemented on college campuses cannot be found in the scholarly literature. Weiss, Cosbey, Habel, Hanson, and Larson (2002) specifically noted the lack of empirical research on assessment. Although many (if not most) institutions and their component parts, due to the push for more accountability, are engaged in some form of assessment, "the available literature is fragmentary, dispersed over many arenas, and not often subject to scholarly review" (Tontodonato, 2006, p. 164).

Along these same lines, a review of the literature conducted for this research turned up only a few studies that deal with assessment efforts in criminal justice

programs and departments at various colleges and universities. However, as suspected, none of them contain data that describe how student learning is being assessed in criminal justice programs as an entire discipline. Most of the studies are based on individual institutions, but one is an analysis of outcomes assessment in postsecondary occupational programs at seven community colleges in the Mid-Hudson Region of New York State. In this particular review, Winter and Fadale (1991) found that criminal justice programs predominantly used capstone courses, follow-up surveys of students and graduates, cohort tracking, and specifically designed assignments to assess student learning.

In another study involving assessment in criminal justice programs at more than one institution, Culbertson and Carr (1981) reviewed 759 undergraduate course syllabi on law enforcement, courts and law, corrections, and general criminal justice and criminology from 193 junior, community, and senior colleges and universities. Based on the analysis, a set of syllabi to represent the core of a criminal justice curriculum was constructed. During this review, the authors concluded that many of the criminal justice programs they reviewed used students, criminal justice agencies, and university governing bodies to assess the effectiveness of their curriculum.

Standards. In 1994, Myers argued that the major obstacle to assessing the quality and effectiveness of criminal justice programs is "the lack of agreement on standards in the discipline" (p. 32). Standards, in this case, are criteria established by organizations that accredit professional programs. Myers also added that "medical schools, law schools, and even business schools have a long-standing tradition of quality standards, but newer disciplines, such as criminal justice, are still developing such standards" (p.

32). The Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), introduced earlier in the chapter, recently adopted a set of Certification Standards for Academic Programs that are meant to improve the quality of criminal justice education. Prior to the Certification Standards, ACJS created Minimum Standards for Criminal Justice Education, a peer review process adopted in 1998. The Minimum Standards reflected regional accreditation standards and a modification of the standards adopted in the fall of 1994 by the Northeastern Association of Criminal Justice Sciences (NEACJS). The NEACJS standards were built on those that Ward and Webb (1984) outlined in *Quest for Quality: A Report to the Commission on Criminology and Criminal Justice Education and Standards.* Previous efforts in North Carolina and by the Southern Criminal Justice Association also served to inform the development of these standards.

Because criminal justice academic standards are still emerging, Myers (1994) introduced what she refers to as a new, more appropriate method of assessment that takes into account the evolving standards of quality in the discipline. A criminal justice program, or any program in a relatively young discipline, that wants to measure its effectiveness must engage in continuous self-evaluation of its ability to meet standards on three levels: individual, organizational, and environmental. The individual level includes demographic and learning characteristics of applicants and graduates. Demographic factors, like age, race, gender, and residence, should be analyzed to ensure a heterogeneous student population. Learning factors, such as grade point averages and test scores of entering students, should be compared to grades and achievement test

scores within the program to recognize the types of students who are successful under certain conditions and those who are not.

The organizational level refers to the criminal justice program itself and the larger institution in which the program resides. Characteristics of this level that should be part of the evaluation include organizational variables such as the program faculty's level of involvement in student development and their ability to meet student needs, the mission and curriculum of the program, and features of the college or university in terms of the type of institution it is, the resources it provides, and any requirements it may impose on individual programs.

Last, the environmental level consists of influences that do not originate within the program or the university. These influences can be divided into two categories: those that stem from local and state factors (community) and those that are generated by the federal government (global). To determine whether it is meeting its goal of producing qualified graduates, Myers (1994) claimed that a criminal justice program must analyze the interaction of these three system components. This is a way for programs to establish a "feedback loop" and evaluate itself on a continuous basis relative to minimum and maximum standards in the discipline.

Exit Examination. Before the Education Testing Service developed the Major Field Test in criminal justice in 2001, there was no nationally-normed test in the field that served as a measure to assess what graduating seniors had learned. A 1994 study described one criminal justice department's attempt at creating a standardized exit exam for its 350 majors. In 1988, the Criminal Justice Department at a Midwestern four-year

university developed a test that consisted of 100 items that addressed the material in six core courses of the curriculum. Students scored higher in areas related to law enforcement, corrections, and the criminal justice system in general. They received lower marks in areas pertaining to criminal law, research methods, and juvenile justice. These results implied that the criminal justice students "retain more of the information that is repeated, or built on, in a number of courses. They also suggest that the students are not retaining juvenile justice and research methods as well as other areas of study" (Veneziano and Brown, 1994, p. 55). While there are always drawbacks to introducing new initiatives, these findings motivated faculty to reexamine the program's curricular goals, and provided information about the levels of retention, areas of weaknesses among students, and student learning styles.

Graduate Record Examination. The validity of the Graduate Record Examination (GRE) as a predictor of graduate student performance is a concept that has been marked by much debate. Some research finds a relationship between the two variables, while other research points toward none. In fact, there is even evidence from chemistry that they have a negative relationship – the higher the GRE scores, the lower the graduate student performance (House, 1999 as cited in Stack and Kelley, 2002). Two studies were found that focused on the predictive validity of GREs on the performance of graduate students in criminal justice programs. In the earlier study, data were collected from the files of 94 students who graduated from the master's degree program in criminal justice at a medium-sized, Southern university from 1989 to 1999. These data indicated that undergraduate grade point average (GPA) and GRE scores explained about 40 percent of

the variance in graduate GPA, leaving about 60 percent of the variance unexplained. Authors of this report suggested that undergraduate GPA and GRE scores should not be the only criteria for admissions into graduate-level criminal justice programs (McKee et al., 2001).

In the fall of 2001, student performance information – GRE scores, graduate GPAs, grades in required classes, and the number of years it took to complete the degree – was collected from the archival files of 70 criminal justice majors in a master's degree program at a large, urban Midwestern university. Data came from students who were admitted to the program beginning in 1990 and ending in 1999. Overall results from this study, along with findings from previous research based on disciplines other than criminal justice, indicated that GRE scores are largely unrelated to indicators of graduate student performance. The verbal GRE score, however, was found to be a significant predictor of graduate GPA in this analysis. Twenty-one percent of the variance in graduate GPA can be explained by verbal GRE scores alone (Stack and Kelley, 2002). The verbal GRE in the earlier study (Mckee et al., 2001) also explained most of the variance in graduate GPA, but it was only ten percent.

While variance in graduate GPA is usually very limited (range is 3.0 to 4.0) and the idea of it being explained by GRE scores is difficult to grasp, authors suggested that GRE scores may in fact be more predictive of graduate GPA in disciplines, like criminal justice, that have low mean GRE scores than in disciplines with high mean GRE scores such as psychology. This correlation may indicate a "nonlinear relationship marked by a ceiling effect" that causes GRE scores to increase graduate GPA only up to a certain

point (Stack and Kelley, 2002, p. 345). "After that ceiling is reached," the authors stated, "further gains in GRE scores bring diminishing returns to [graduate GPA]. Once a certain level of intellectual functioning as measured by the GRE is reached, the predictive powers of the GRE may become weaker" (p. 345).

The finding that verbal GRE scores are better predictors of graduate student performance than quantitative GRE scores is consistent with research in other areas of the social sciences. In their conclusion, Stack and Kelley (2002) wrote, "Given that [criminal justice] is not as quantitatively oriented as the hard sciences, mathematics, and engineering, it is not surprising that [verbal GRE] would predict [graduate GPA] better than [quantitative GRE]" (pp. 345-346). Since GRE scores have proven to be poor indicators of graduate student performance, programs with low average GRE scores, like criminal justice, may not have less qualified students compared to programs with high average GRE scores (Stack and Kelley, 2002).

Focus Groups. Stitt, Leone, and Jennings-Clawson (1998) suggested that focus groups (in-depth interactive interviews) can serve as a "valuable, viable, cost-effective tool" in criminal justice program evaluation (p. 79). These authors also commented that most undergraduate criminal justice programs offer senior seminars, major capstone courses, or any other courses taken exclusively by seniors. These classes provide an adequate sample for focus groups that can produce valuable feedback about the programs.

Internship-Preparation Course. Professional programs (for example in business, teacher education, criminal justice, social work, law, and health care) are more likely to

offer, and often require experiential learning activities, like internships, capstone courses, student teaching, and clinical experiences, where students must apply the skills and knowledge acquired during their previous coursework. The fieldwork experience allows students to discover what it takes to be successful in the workplace and whether or not they are prepared. Often times, students are not prepared for the fieldwork and lose the value of the internship. The criminal justice faculty at SUNY Oswego, where criminal justice majors are required to complete an internship prior to graduation, found that the best way to better prepare students is to develop a course that gives students the tools to be successful in their internship. Some of the tasks students must perform in the course include creating a professional portfolio and resume, and submitting observation reports and a short theory and practice paper. According to the two criminal justice faculty members responsible for the development of this course, "Extensive preparation of internship students is vital to ensure quality," and it is imperative that interns are familiar with the goals and benefits of any upcoming fieldwork experience (Sgroi and Ryniker, 2002, p. 199).

Student Surveys. Very recently, two articles discussed the administration of student surveys in criminal justice programs as a way to self-evaluate and ultimately improve their quality and effectiveness. The most recent study focused on student satisfaction at a large state university in Midwest United States. Satisfaction is recommended as a measure of program quality as it provides feedback on student experiences and perceptions of the program. As part of the university's interest in outcomes assessment and ongoing accreditation efforts, graduating criminal justice

students were given a four-page anonymous survey that included questions focusing on reasons why student chose the major, satisfaction issues, and future career plans. Additional information was gathered on student problems, financial matters, advising, participation in internships and campus groups, grade point average, and standard demographics. Of the 170 students who would graduate with a bachelor of arts in criminal justice in 2003, 141 (83%) completed the department survey. The main findings revealed that:

- Most students were attracted to the program because of the interesting nature of the material and its relevance for their career plans.
- Although most graduating seniors were happy with the programs, over ten percent felt neutrally or were dissatisfied with their experiences.
- Student concerns most commonly involved getting needed classes and time management. Interestingly, advising was not frequently mentioned as a difficult problem, although it was predictive of satisfaction with the university (Tontodonato, 2006, p. 176).

While the findings from the survey were clearly and comprehensively discussed in the report, the author made no reference to any changes that might have been made to the program based on the data. In the last paragraph of the article, the author pointed out that information derived from students is just one factor in a program's overall assessment efforts. In order to determine whether criminal justice programs are reaching their goals and objectives, other sources of data must be considered and analyzed.

The other student survey was completed by 238 (60 percent of department's active majors and 80 percent of majors taking classes during that semester) criminal justice majors at Wayne State University in Detroit as part of the undergraduate

curriculum review process in the fall of 2001. Such a review, as Kelley (2004) noted, "challenges the faculty to examine core curriculum components, elective course offerings, the alignment of the curriculum with departmental and institutional missions, and the quality of the teaching or learning environment" (p. 219). This particular study was the first to "seriously and systematically" include the characteristics and opinions of undergraduate majors into the curriculum review process. According to Southerland (2002), the criminal justice curriculum must be updated regularly to keep up with current issues and trends (technology for example) that may warrant the addition or removal of courses. Southerland (2002) specifically stated, "In comparison to the ACJS Minimum Standards, the 1988-89 criminal justice curriculum requirements were in better shape nationally than they were in 1999-2000. We have lost ground in the areas of corrections, statistics, and the interdisciplinary foundation of our field" (p. 599).

The survey instrument used in Kelley's (2004) analysis was designed based on each faculty member's contributions. It contained 82 items that covered content areas such as demographics, employment, career aspirations, education, course interest ratings, course difficulty ratings, teaching method rankings, grading method rankings, and impact of 9/11. As the survey findings were discussed throughout this report, so were the revisions that were under consideration or had been made to the criminal justice department as a result of the data. For example, based on student survey responses, the department was considering the addition of several course electives including criminal investigation, criminology, law and legal studies, race and gender issues, and practical training. Also, results from the questions about teaching and grading methods signified

that a majority of the majors would respond best to a teaching format that was about equally divided between hands-on/visual approaches and auditory presentations. Although most criminal justice faculty lecture for a large portion of the class and others often view the hands-on/visual methods inconsequential in comparison, this finding has led faculty to reexamine their teaching methods and consider the addition of more hands-on/visual techniques of instruction. Kelley (2004) concluded by praising the use of student surveys, and recommended that many criminal justice programs incorporate them into their curriculum review processes.

Technology. The use of computers in college instruction is a growing trend that has gained attention over the past several years. A decade ago, about 15 percent of all classes on college campuses used internet resources. Two years later in 1998, this number jumped to one-third, and almost half of college courses required regular email use (Merisotis, 1999). As online education becomes more popular, more research related to it emerges into the literature. This does not mean, however, that all of the research is conclusive or well-defined. The research that has been done on web-based courses implies that there are few differences in student satisfaction and in the quality of the learning experiences, as measured by test scores and student feedback, when compared to traditional, face-to-face courses (Snell and Penn, 2005). In addition, previous research is mixed on whether students in courses that provide computer-assisted instruction perform better than those in traditional learning environments. When the two are directly compared, the integration of computer technology into a classroom is generally favorable. The gains in student outcomes, however, are modest at best (Kunkel, 2003).

Two recent case studies were found involving the use of technology in criminal justice programs. The first case study compared student performance and course evaluations for computer-assisted and traditional-approach sections in three different criminal justice courses: crime theory, criminal courts, and inequality in the justice system. In this study, a traditional-approach section involved lecturing without the use of any computer-assisted techniques. In computer-assisted sections, depending on the course, a number of computer-based techniques were used including PowerPoint presentations, online syllabi, online exams, online grade books, the use of internet sites, online bulletin board discussions, and "paperless papers." In accordance with previous research, the results from this case study were ambiguous and unable to determine whether students in computer-assisted sections perform better than students in traditional classes. At first glance, there was a highly significant difference between the performance of computer-assisted students and those in traditional settings. Data indicated that while computer-assisted instruction did, quite possibly, improve student learning, it depended on the type of class. The criminal courts course had the greatest difference, while the crime theory course showed the least difference. While student performance did not diminish from computer-assisted instruction, there was little evidence that this non-traditional approach actually enhanced it. In fact, Kunkel (2003) proclaimed that his results "raise more pedagogical questions than are answered" (p. 101).

The more recent case study described the development and implementation of an online justice studies graduate degree program at an east Texas university. The overall

results of the study were fairly encouraging and supported the continued use of online instruction. One of the primary criticisms of online learning is that the student's time with instructor is reduced. This concern was voiced by students in an end-of-course survey to gain feedback about the course. While students seemed relatively satisfied with their overall online experiences, a significant number believed that the quality and quantity of time spent with their instructor had decreased. As a result, the online faculty have put forth greater efforts to respond to student concerns more quickly, devote more time to discussions, and hold office hours in a chat room. There are many resources, such as total university support, leadership and dedication among all faculty and administrators involved, and financial assistance, that must be secured in order for an online degree program to accomplish its goals. Regardless of the extensive amount of resources it takes to create and maintain an online education program, authors were very much in favor of it. They concluded by stating:

> Online education is here to stay. Universities must take the steps to deliver quality programs to meet the ever-changing needs of students. Distance and technology are no longer limitations to providing quality criminology/criminal justice education to those who desire it. As the demand for criminology/criminal justice education increases, so too should the online delivery of the discipline (Snell and Penn, 2005, p. 35).

As the national debate surrounding student learning assessment is becoming more intense, an increasing number of colleges and universities are climbing on the assessment bandwagon. While the focus remains predominantly on the institution, it will not be long before the academic programs within the institutions are also placed under the microscope. This can be seen in regional accreditation. These commissions may accredit

the whole institution, but they also expect individual programs that make up the whole to participate in assessment activities. If not already mandated by the university in which it resides, criminal justice programs will be expected to assess student learning. In 1991, Southerland observed that many professional educators across the country were beginning to express their concern about the quality of higher education in general, while others specifically criticized criminal justice education. As Southerland (1991) noted, "It is important to assess the current status of criminal justice education in light of both of these critical viewpoints" (p. 46). It must be known how criminal justice measures up to the rest of the campus.

Lessons Learned

Such questions as, "If assessment is such a wonderful idea, why aren't more people doing it?" and "If everyone's doing it, why isn't more getting done?" have been posed in recent literature referring to current efforts to assess student learning outcomes in higher education (Burke, 1999, p. 3). Providing a response to the "why" questions, Ewell (2002) stated, "Although firmly established in the mainstream by the year 2000, assessment as a movement is still striving for the cultural shift its original proponents had hoped for" (p. 17). While it seems that most institutions are engaging in some form of assessment, the methods used, the results and how they are used, and the commitment to such a task is a mixed bag. Fortunately, this 20-year struggle with assessment, specifically with choosing ways to collect credible and convincing evidence of student learning, has taught some lessons that should be considered by institutions embarking on this process. In a 2005 publication, the Association of American Colleges and

Universities (AAC&U) highlighted some of these learned lessons, which could be employed in the social sciences, including criminal justice, whenever reasonable.

- Course-embedded assessments can be used for individual-, course-, program-, and institution-level assessment of student learning through appropriate analysis and aggregation. Selected assignments can be designated within major courses to serve as threshold, milestone, or capstone assessments. Such assignments can serve as assessments of both general and major-specific knowledge and skills when scored using appropriate methods and personnel.

- Individual student learning can be tracked constantly on campuses through course-level assessments, particularly if faculty learn about good formative and summative assessment practices. Administrative support for faculty development is important.

- Student development takes time so representative samples of student work, gathered at carefully chosen points in a curriculum, can be sufficient to create a program or institutional picture of student learning. Choose the sampling points after analyzing the curriculum to find points at which there is agreement that students will likely have had sufficient opportunity to learn what is being assessed.

- Given that evaluation is the highest level of the cognitive domain, students themselves should be challenged to learn assessment techniques in which they assess work in exactly the same ways used by experts in the particular domain. Not only does this raise the level of student learning, it can also provide cycles of self- and peer-formative assessment, relieving faculty of part of the formative assessment workload (AAC&U, 2005, p. 8).

Conclusions

Since the 1950s and 1960s when the number of students enrolled in American colleges and universities began to escalate, concerns have emerged about the value of an undergraduate education. Investors want to know how their money is being spent and if their investments will yield students who have the knowledge and skill set that qualify

them for the next step – entering the workforce or graduate school. While concerns of this nature never disappeared, they have demanded more attention over the past two decades due to calls for institutional accountability, state and federal mandates, and regional accreditation standards. As indicated throughout this chapter, many scholars claim that assessment is a way to demonstrate that students are learning and ultimately a way to improve the learning and teaching process. So to say that assessment of student learning is just a fad is to say that the value of a college degree will soon be of no concern among stakeholders of higher education.

It is true that much of the focus has been on colleges and universities rather than the academic programs and departments within the institutions. Nevertheless, studies show that the concept of assessment is becoming more popular on college campuses each year, indicating that the single components that make up a college campus will be affected as well. Therefore, it is necessary that individual disciplines, like criminal justice and other social sciences, get on board with assessment. While there is no indication that criminal justice programs are not assessing student learning outcomes, there is also no evidence that they, as an entire discipline, are doing so. In fact, with the exception of a few studies, research about assessment in individual disciplines as a whole is scarce. In other words, there is an abundance of literature related to general information about assessment – definitions, how and why to do it, how and why it gained momentum – and some case studies about institutions and academic programs (including criminal justice) that have engaged in assessment activities, but there is a deficiency in

research that indicates if and how programs are measuring student achievement toward learning outcomes.

This research proposes to contribute, at least in part, to the shortage of discipline-specific assessment scholarship by establishing baseline data that describe how criminal justices programs across the country are conducting student learning outcomes assessment. Not only will methods of assessment be identified, each instrument's perceived effectiveness, or how well it measures student learning, will also be revealed. These baseline data will also be compared to the results from the political science and public relations studies concerning learning assessment activities taking place in these particular social science disciplines. The next chapter explains in detail the methods that will be employed to gather such information, as well as the techniques that will be used to analyze the data.

Chapter 3
Methods

A review of the literature was completed in search of studies that focus on how criminal justice programs in American colleges and universities conduct student learning outcomes assessment. Some information is known, but there are no overall summary data. While no studies were found that provided information about how criminal justice programs engage in student assessment, Kelly and Klunk (2003) conducted a study with similar research objectives that focused on learning assessment in political science departments in the United States. With the authors' permission, their survey instrument was adapted to correspond with criminal justice rather than political science and used in this research project. Originally, the instrument was submitted to the Institutional Review Board (IRB) on March 1, 2005 in the form of a mail survey as it was in the political science study. As shown in Appendix A, approval was granted two months later on April 5, 2005. After careful consideration, however, the instrument was converted into a web-based survey and re-submitted to the IRB on June 21, 2005. Final IRB approval was received on August 11, 2005 as indicated in Appendix B.

Before and after the online version was developed, the survey was pre-tested among several criminal justice professionals and revised based on their feedback. The most significant change was the addition of a question that asks respondents to rate, on a

six-point scale, the effectiveness of assessment instrument(s) being used in their criminal justice program or department. Other major changes included: added questions that requested more general information about the program and institution in which it resides; added and excluded a few learning objectives making the question relevant to criminal justice; added several assessment instruments that are recognized in current literature; and asked respondents who are not currently involved in student learning assessment to please skip the survey.

The web-based survey, which is illustrated in a Microsoft Word format in Appendix C, will be designed and administered using SurveyMonkey, a tool used to create web surveys. The questionnaire consists of six sections that include thirty open- and closed-ended questions focusing on assessment: 1) general information about the institution such as size and type of the criminal justice program, 2) learning objectives developed by the program, 3) assessment instruments used by the program, 4) methods of analyzing the assessment data, 5) application of learning assessment results such as changes made to the criminal justice major based on results, and 6) institutional environment such as the resources available to the criminal justice program for conducting assessment activities. The organization and content of the survey questions are aligned with the "ideal type" of learning assessment model (Kelly and Klunk, 2003; Nichols, 1995a), where one develops a set of learning objectives that are aligned with the curriculum, creates and implements assessment instruments, regularly collects and analyzes data generated by the assessment instruments, and makes changes to improve the curriculum/instruction based on results of the data analysis.

The sampling frame is a comprehensive list of all two- and four-year accredited colleges and universities in the United States that offer a degree in criminal justice/criminology as compiled from Peterson's *Four-Year Colleges* (2004) and Peterson's *Two-Year Colleges* (2004). These sources divide the field of interest into five categories: 1) criminalistics and criminal science, 2) criminal justice/law enforcement administration, 3) criminal justice/police science, 4) criminal justice/safety, and 5) criminology. Institutions that are listed as offering criminology programs and criminal justice programs that focus on law enforcement administration and police science will be included in the sampling frame. Those that fall under the remaining categories of safety and criminalistics and criminal science, however, will not be included. At the end of 2004, there were a total of 834 accredited institutions in the country that offer a degree in criminal justice/criminology – 435 four-year colleges and universities and 399 two-year (community) colleges. According to Southerland's (2002) research on criminal justice programs and curricula, there were 408 baccalaureate criminal justice programs in 1999-2000, indicating about a six percent increase in programs since then.

Based on the population size of 834 and a desired confidence level of 95 percent, a sample size of 263 will be sought. This number was calculated by using a formula developed by Krejcie and Morgan (1970) as presented in Isaac and Michael's (1995) *Handbook in Research and Evaluation*. Although this research is descriptive, the intention is for the results from the survey to be generalizable to all criminal justice programs. Therefore, an attempt will be made to generate a random sample in order to

increase the likelihood that it would be representative of the overall population of criminal justice programs.

A random sample will be generated by selecting every fourth institution from the sampling frame until the required number of institutions is obtained. Once the sample is created, a search of institutional websites will be done to locate criminal justice program directors or department chairs with available contact information (e.g., email addresses). A hyperlink to the survey, along with a cover letter explaining the research objectives, will then be emailed to criminal justice faculty at 360 two- and four-year colleges and universities (200 four-year institutions and 160 community colleges) across the nation. This figure is based on a return rate of 75 percent that is anticipated due to an increasing interest in the subject matter, Dr. Laura Moriarty's (chair of the committee serving this research and administrator of the survey) position as president of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), a national association where certification is a major priority, and a raffle offering one complimentary ACJS institutional membership to the criminal justice program that completes the survey and is selected in a drawing that will take place once the survey is closed. These factors are believed to increase the number of criminal justice administrators who respond to the survey.

The survey will be emailed to each of these individuals starting the first Monday in October, 2005, and will continue through the remainder of that week until all contacts in the sample have received the questionnaire. The email message will include the purpose of the research, details about the drawing offering a complementary ACJS institutional membership to one of the survey respondents and the benefits of such a

membership, and a link to the survey. Reminders will be sent out a month later during the first week in November to every criminal justice program in the sample except for those that specifically indicate that they have already responded. Otherwise, there will be no way to determine which programs complete the survey because the only way respondents will be linked to their answers is through the internet protocol (IP) addresses, which hold no value. If necessary, a third and final reminder will be sent out in late November or early December to those programs in the sample, again excluding the contacts that specifically indicate that they have already completed the survey. Each of the three email messages is presented in more detail in Chapter 4 and attached as an appendix (Appendix D, E, and F). Individuals other than the survey administrators will no longer be able to access the online survey beginning January 15, 2006.

In order to get a sense of how representative the sample is of national criminal justice programs, regional ACJS membership data will be compared to the regional accrediting associations identified by the sample. Although it will not be an exact match with the ACJS regions and the states included in the regional accrediting organizations, the ACJS membership figures will be adjusted to reflect the same states as those represented by each regional accrediting body. A figure that illustrates this comparison will be provided in the next chapter.

Once the data collection process is complete, the data will be downloaded from SurveyMonkey to Microsoft Excel, where they will be checked and cleaned. The IP addresses will also be deleted during this process in order for survey respondents to remain completely anonymous, which will be explained in the cover letter so respondents

will be able to give their full consent. After the data are cleaned, they will be exported to SPSS. Using SPSS, the survey questions will be converted into a set of variables, each variable will be coded when appropriate, and the data associated with these variables will be analyzed.

Because the purpose of this research project is to describe how criminal justice programs in higher education are assessing student achievement toward learning outcomes, descriptive statistical analysis will be conducted. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies and percentages, will allow the sample data to be summarized in an understandable and meaningful way. For example, the percentage of criminal justice programs currently assessing student learning, the most popular learning outcome among programs, the assessment instrument most often used by programs, and the assessment method that is rated most effective by the programs can be determined using descriptive statistics.

This research will not only establish national baseline data that describe how criminal justice programs are assessing student learning outcomes, but unlike the political science study, it will also determine how well the assessment instruments being used are working. Furthermore, the results of the survey used in this research will be compared to assessment data in other social science disciplines including political science and public relations. Overall, this research will identify the following characteristics about criminal justice programs in the sample:

- Learning objectives that have been established;
- How and when learning objectives were developed;

- Assessment instruments used and how well they work;
- Techniques of data analysis;
- Conclusions drawn as a result of data analysis;
- Changes made as a result of conclusions; and
- Available resources to perform student learning assessment activities.

An in-depth discussion of the survey findings is provided in Chapter 4. Also presented in Chapter 4 will be any revisions that are made to the research methods and/or data analysis approach once the methods are employed.

Chapter 4
Data Analysis

Chapter 4 reports the analysis of the data generated by the criminal justice learning assessment survey used for this research, as well as the results from the political science and public relations studies referenced in the first three chapters. The results from these two studies are then compared to the criminal justice data to determine the differences and similarities, in terms of assessment, that may exist in these social science disciplines. Presented first is a description of the sample and a detailed account of each of the three email messages sent to criminal justice professionals in the sample requesting their participation in this research.

The sampling frame used in this study was compiled from a list of all two- and four-year accredited colleges and universities in the United States that offer a degree in criminal justice/criminology (N=834). A random sample was generated by selecting every fourth institution from the sampling frame. After the sample was created, a search of the institutions' websites was done in order to locate contact information of criminal justice program directors or department chairs. Email addresses were primarily sought since the questionnaire was web-based and sent to the sample via email. After viewing these websites, precisely 135 colleges and universities, approximately 70 percent which were two-year (community) colleges, were removed from the sample and replaced with

other institutions in the population for a number of reasons:

- No criminal justice program is listed on the website – what appeared was a criminal justice minor or concentration (just over half of the four-year colleges and universities that were removed from the sample were removed for this reason);
- The degree program is too specific in one area of criminal justice, for example, criminal justice technology, rather than being more general like criminal justice (just over half of the community colleges that were removed from the sample were removed for this reason);
- The institution offers only online degrees for all disciplines;
- Another campus from the same institution was already in the sample;
- No faculty and/or faculty contact information is listed on the website; and/or
- The website is so poorly designed and out of date that it was not navigable.

A hyperlink to the survey, along with a cover letter explaining the research objectives, was emailed to criminal justice professionals at 370 two- and four-year institutions of higher education across the United States. Originally, 360 criminal justice programs from the sample were targeted based on a sample size of 263 that was sought and a 75 percent return rate that was expected. A return rate of this size was originally anticipated due to an increasing interest in the subject matter, Dr. Moriarty's position as president of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS), and a raffle offering one complimentary ACJS institutional membership to the criminal justice program selected in the drawing after completing the survey.

In addition to the 360 criminal justice programs, there were 15 programs recently reviewed by ACJS that needed to be surveyed as well. Five of these programs were already included in the sample, however, resulting in a total of 370 surveys that were administered to criminal justice professionals (at 208 four-year institutions and 162 community colleges).

The survey was emailed to each of these individuals over a three-day period between October 3rd and October 5th, 2005. The email message, attached as Appendix D, included the purpose of the study, details about the drawing offering a complementary ACJS institutional membership to one of the survey respondents and the benefits of such a membership, and a link to the survey. A total of 14 "bad" email addresses were collected from the websites – seven of the addresses were simply listed incorrectly on the websites, and seven of the websites listed a criminal justice program director or department chair that was no longer affiliated with the institution or no longer had a working email address for some reason. Furthermore, several emails were received from individuals in the sample indicating that they were no longer or never were affiliated with the criminal justice program in their academic institution. Some of these individuals forwarded the survey to the appropriate person or identified the appropriate person in their response email, while others simply stated that they thought they had received the survey in error.

Reminders (Appendix E) were sent out a month later on November 3rd and 4th to every criminal justice program in the sample except for those that specifically indicated they had already responded. Otherwise, there was no way to determine which programs

completed the survey because the only way respondents are linked to their answers is through the internet protocol (IP) addresses, which hold no value. In addition to the information provided in the original email message, reminders also included a statement about cutting and pasting the survey link into their web browser if respondents could not get the link to work properly. This statement was included because several of the criminal justice faculty members contacted indicated that they could not access the survey by clicking on the link. After the second reminder was sent out, one contact replied to the email and stated that the university with which he is affiliated no longer has a criminal justice program. Consequently, this particular university was taken out of the sample and replaced with another four-year institution.

A final reminder, as shown in Appendix F, was sent out November 23rd and November 28th to those programs in the sample, excluding the contacts that had specifically indicated they had completed the survey. This email requested that the individual complete the survey or, if he/she was not the person who could complete the survey, to please pass it along to someone in the department or program that could. In order to distinguish between the criminal justice departments and programs that are not assessing student learning and those that simply did not respond to the survey, the reminder also asked the respondent to indicate that no assessment was taking place, if that was the case. A total of 13 criminal justice programs in the sample – four located in a four-year institution and nine located in a community college – indicated that they were not assessing student learning outcomes at that time. Additionally, a response to the final email reminder indicated that the individual who had been contacted at a particular four-

year college would not be able to complete the survey due to medical problems. Therefore, this institution was removed from the sample, but was not replaced with another college or university because this was an inability to respond, not an unwillingness to respond, and there was no other person in this particular college who could have completed the survey.

When determining the overall return rate, the total number of surveys emailed to criminal justice professionals fell from 370 to 369 due to the removal of this four-year institution from the sample. Based on these numbers, a 44 percent return rate (162/369) was obtained – 101 responses came from four-year institutions and 60 responses came from community colleges (one respondent did not indicate institution type). While this return rate is lower than what is anticipated in more traditional modes of survey research, particularly telephone surveys, this percentage is excellent for a web-based survey (Tuten et al., 2002).

After the online survey was closed on January 15th, 2006 and could no longer be accessed, one institution was selected for a free, one-year ACJS institutional membership that was included as an incentive for individuals to respond to the questionnaire. Respondents who wished to be included in the drawing were instructed to inform Dr. Moriarty by email once they had completed the survey. Mountain State University in Beckley, West Virginia was the recipient of the complementary ACJS institutional membership valued at $250.

In order to get a sense of how representative the sample is of national criminal justice programs, regional ACJS membership data were compared to the regional accrediting associations identified by the sample. Figure 2 illustrates these comparisons. Although it is not an exact match with the ACJS regions and the states included in the regional accrediting bodies, the ACJS membership figures were adjusted to reflect the same states as listed in the regional accrediting organizations. For example, the ACJS Northeast region consists of all the states that are under the purview of the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA) and New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC). The number of programs in the sample accredited by MSA and the number accredited by NEASC were simply added together to determine the percent of the criminal justice programs that are accredited by either organization, and then that value (28%) was compared to the ACJS value (31%). The ACJS values represent the number of ACJS members in each of the five ACJS regions as a proportion of the total number of ACJS members. This was also done for the Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities (NWCCU) and the Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC). Combined, these regional accrediting commissions represent the same states that are also covered by the ACJS Western and Pacific region.

As shown in Figure 2, the largest portion of institutions in the sample is accredited by NCA (34.9%), followed by SACS (26.7%), MSA (17.1%), NEASC (11%), WASC (6.2%), and NWCCU (4.1%). When comparisons were made with the ACJS membership, the percentages for each regional accrediting organization were quite

similar indicating a sample that is representative of the national distribution of criminal justice programs (Moriarty, 2006).

Figure 2
Comparison of Current Sample Regional Accrediting Organizations with ACJS Regional Membership (Reproduced with permission. Moriarty, 2006)

Regional Accrediting Organization	Region	Parallel with ACJS Regions
Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSA)	Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania	Northeast Delaware, District of Columbia, Maryland, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania
New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)	Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont	Northeast Connecticut, Maine, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Rhode Island, Vermont
Sample, ACJS	**28%**	**31%**
North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCA)	Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, Wyoming	West Virginia (South for ACJS); Wyoming (Western and Pacific for ACJS) Midwest Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Nebraska, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota, Wisconsin Southwest Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, New Mexico, Oklahoma
Sample, ACJS	**35%**	**29%**
Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities (NWCCU)	Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington	Western and Pacific Alaska, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, Oregon, Utah, Washington
Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)	California, Hawaii	Western and Pacific California, Hawaii
Sample, ACJS	**10.3%**	**10.1%**
Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)	Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia	Southern Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Virginia, (Texas in Southwest for ACJS)
Sample, ACJS	**27%**	**28%**

Notes: Subtracted Texas from Southwest, added it to Southern. Subtracted Wyoming from Western and Pacific, added it to Midwest/Southwest; Subtracted West Virginia from Southern, added it to Midwest/Southwest.

Analysis of Criminal Justice Survey Data

The first section of this chapter is very similar to Dr. Moriarty's presidential address where she reported on the findings from the criminal justice learning assessment survey. The intent of this survey has always been two-fold: that is, to provide data for her presidential address which will be published in *Justice Quarterly*, and secondly to serve as the database for this research. Thus, with explicit permission, I borrow much of her descriptive reporting of the survey results. While I may not have written all of the words, I was very much involved in the data analyses and the proofreading and consulting of the results as presented. Therefore, Dr. Moriarty has agreed to let me use her description of the data, verbatim at times, for this particular section of Chapter 4.

The results of the criminal justice data analysis are discussed in sections similar to the way the questions were presented in the survey: general information, student learning objectives, assessment instruments, analysis of assessment data, institutional environment, and application of assessment results.

General Information

There were 162 criminal justice program directors and department chairs who responded to the online survey. Of these, 22 (13.6%) specifically indicated that they were not conducting assessment at that time – 13 in the original email correspondence and nine in the questionnaire itself. The first set of questions asked for general information about the criminal justice program or department and the institution in which it is located. These demographic data help to describe the sample and are displayed in Table 1.

Table 1
Demographic Information of Institutions and Criminal Justice Programs

Institution Type				**Criminal Justice Degrees Offered**		**Location of Criminal Justice Unit**		**Description of Criminal Justice Unit (4-year institutions only)**	
Community college	34.5% (51)	Public	66.2% (98)	Associate	33.3% (79)	Program within a school	8.1% (12)	Offers graduate work and has over 20 full-time faculty members	4.3% (4)
College or university that offers under-graduate work only	12.8% (19)	Private	21.6% (32)	Baccalau-reate	38.4% (91)	One of many programs within a department	34.5% (51)	Offers graduate work and has 11 to 20 full-time faculty members	11.7% (11)
College or university that offers both under-graduate and graduate work	52.7% (78)	Private with religious affiliation	11.5% (17)	Master	19.4% (46)	Department combined with other disciplines	18.2% (27)	Offers graduate work and has 10 or fewer full-time faculty members	31.9% (30)
Other	0% (0)	Other	0.7% (1)	Doctorate	4.6% (11)	Department in and of itself	32.4% (48)	Offers only under-graduate work only and has over 5 full-time faculty members	11.7% (11)
				Other	4.2% (10)	School in and of itself	3.4% (5)	Offers only under-graduate work and has 5 or fewer full-time faculty members	35.1% (33)
						Other	3.4% (5)	Combined with other disciplines	5.3% (5)
								Other	0% (0)

More than half (53%) of the respondents described their institution as a college or university that offers both undergraduate and graduate work, just over one-third (34.5%) are community colleges, and 66 percent are public institutions. Most of the programs offer an AA/AS/AAS (38%) and BA/BS (33%) degree in criminal justice, 19 percent offer a MA/MS degree in criminal justice, and nearly five percent offer a Ph.D. in criminal justice. The "other" category consisted mostly of concentrations/certificates in criminal justice and baccalaureate degrees in criminal justice offered through a partnership between community colleges and a four-year institution. A little more than one-third (34.5 %) of the criminal justice programs that responded are located in a department with many other programs, and almost another third (32%) are independent departments. Thirty-five percent are described as criminal justice programs that offer only undergraduate work and have five or fewer full-time faculty members, and just under a third (32%) offer graduate work and have ten or fewer full-time faculty members.

The range of undergraduate and graduate criminal justice majors in four-year institutions was 10 to 3,000 with a mean of nearly 394 and 0 to 800 with a mean of almost 66, respectively. For community colleges, there was an average of approximately 243 majors, with just about three full-time faculty members and nine adjuncts per criminal justice program. These data are presented in Table 2.

Table 2
Number of Criminal Justice Majors and Faculty

Community Colleges				Four-Year Institutions			
	Min	Max	Mean		Min	Max	Mean
Number of full-time Criminal Justice faculty members	1	34	2.7	Number of undergraduate Criminal Justice majors	10	3,000	393.8
Number of adjunct Criminal Justice faculty members	0	54	8.9	Number of graduate Criminal Justice majors	0	800	65.8
Number of Criminal Justice majors	1	2,000	243.2				

Student Learning Objectives

The first question in this section asked respondents to indicate when the assessment of student learning had started in their program[1]. The time period ranged from 1965 to 2005 with a concerted push toward assessment in 2000, and again in 2002 through 2004. Twenty-two percent of the programs that answered this question (n=132) indicated that they did not know when their program started to assess student learning. Respondents were then asked, "At what stage is your program in developing learning objectives for your criminal justice majors?" Of those responding (n=122), over half (53.3%) indicated that they had implemented a set of learning objectives, but 23 or 19 percent of programs had not yet developed student learning objectives. This means that there is still a great deal of work that needs to be done for a large number of units. Almost one-quarter (24.6%) of those who responded were somewhere in the assessment

[1] Program is the generic term used throughout the chapter to mean criminal justice program, department, or school.

process with just under three percent just beginning to talk about learning objectives, 14 percent being in the process of formulating learning objectives, and roughly eight percent having formulated a set of learning objectives that had been adopted but not implemented. Close to 20 percent were in the process of reviewing or revising a previously adopted set of learning objectives.

The adoption of a set of student learning objectives is a relatively new endeavor for most programs although a few respondents indicated that their program had adopted such a set as early as the mid to late 1970s. There seems to be a parallel with the discussion of student learning assessment and the adoption of learning objectives, which makes intuitive sense. Thus, the time period when programs first adopted a set of learning objectives ranged from 1976 to 2005 with a strong effort in 2000, and again in 2002 through 2004. Of the programs that responded to this question (n= 99), 20 percent did not know when their student learning objectives were initially adopted. When asked about the process for identifying the student learning objectives, it was found that one-third of the responding programs (n=117) developed the objectives as part of a series of regular meetings involving all departmental faculty members, 24 percent used a departmental subcommittee, and about nine percent each developed them at a departmental retreat or by the chair working alone. Approximately five percent adopted their learning objectives from another source and made minor modifications, another five percent did not know how their learning objectives were developed, and nearly 14 percent indicated "other" (e.g., assessment committee; assessment director; chair working with advisory boards; interdisciplinary or multi-departmental committee).

When asked how the students know about the departmental student learning objectives, respondents listed in rank order: course syllabi (46.2%), informed by advisors (21.5%), departmental website (12%), "other" (e.g., appears in college catalogue/program brochure) (5.7%), departmental newsletter or other mailing to all majors (3.2%), and electronic bulletin boards (3.2 %). About eight percent indicated that there was no mechanism to inform students about the learning objectives.

In order to determine which student learning objectives are being used in assessment in criminal justice programs, one question in this section asked respondents to choose from a list of learning objectives and indicate which of those were being assessed in programs. The top three learning objectives, as shown in Table 3, included develop critical thinking skills (96%), develop writing skills (89%), and be familiar with major theories major theories and analytical approaches in criminal justice (88%). Two-thirds (66%) to almost three-quarters of respondents indicated the following as student learning objectives included in their programs: be familiar with the major subfields of criminal justice (74%), develop interpersonal communication skills (70%), understand ethnic, gender, or cultural dimensions of problems and policies related to criminal justice (69%), and comprehend criminal justice research (66%). More than half or half of the programs selected the following learning objectives: develop skills in making public presentations (55%), develop information technology skills (55%), know general management and administrative principles applicable to criminal justice (50%), acquire practical experience in areas of criminal justice (50%), and develop reading skills (50%).

Table 3
Student Learning Objectives in Criminal Justice Programs

Student Learning Objectives	Institutions Using Learning Objective
Develop critical thinking skills	95.9% (93)
Develop writing skills	88.7% (86)
Be familiar with major theories and analytical approaches in criminal justice	87.6% (85)
Be familiar with the major subfields of criminal justice	74.2% (72)
Develop interpersonal communication skills	70.1% (68)
Understand ethnic, gender, or cultural dimensions of problems and policies related to criminal justice	69.1% (67)
Read and understand criminal justice research	66% (64)
Develop skills in making public presentations	54.6% (53)
Develop information technology skills	54.6% (53)
Know general management and administrative principles applicable to criminal justice	49.5% (48)
Acquire practical experience in areas of criminal justice	49.5% (48)
Develop reading skills	49.5% (48)
Use quantitative and statistical approaches to criminal justice	44.3% (43)
Design and conduct criminal justice research projects	41.2% (40)
Develop a fundamental understanding of cognate disciplines like political science, sociology, psychology, or public administration	41.2% (40)
Understand the international dimensions of problems and policies related to criminal justice	36.1% (35)
Other – over half are ethics-related.	10.3% (10)

The other learning objectives in the list were used in more than one-third of the programs: employ quantitative and statistical approaches to solve criminal justice problems/issues (44%), design and conduct criminal justice research projects (41%), develop a fundamental understanding of cognate disciplines like political science,

sociology, psychology, or public administration (41%), and understand the international dimensions of problems and policies related to criminal justice (36%). About ten percent of the programs selected "other," and more than half of these objectives were related to ethics.

Assessment Instruments

This section of the questionnaire began by asking respondents where their programs were in terms of determining which assessment instruments to use to measure how well criminal justice majors achieve departmental learning objectives. Over half (52.1%) of the programs that responded to this question (n=96) had identified and implemented an assessment instrument, while almost 20 percent were reviewing or revising previously implemented instruments. The other 28 percent had not had any discussions about an assessment instrument (7.3%), had discussed an assessment instrument but not decided on it (13.5%), or had decided on an assessment instrument but not yet implemented it (7.3%). For those who had adopted an assessment instrument, the time period for when it was first adopted ranged from 1980 to 2005 with a flurry of activity occurring in 2000 to 2005. Of the programs that responded to this question (n=68), 22 percent did not know when their assessment instruments were initially adopted.

The assessment instruments were developed by the full department in regular meetings (32.6%), by a departmental subcommittee (27%), by the chair working alone (12.4%), adopted from another source (9%), or at a departmental retreat (5.6%). About three percent did not know how the assessment instruments were developed, and ten

percent indicated "other" (e.g., full- and part-time faculty; chair working with adjunct faculty or a subcommittee/advisory board; assessment committee).

Respondents were given a wide array of assessment techniques from which they could choose to indicate which of these techniques were used in their program. For each assessment technique employed, respondents were also instructed to rate its effectiveness. While respondents were instructed to rate only the instruments they use, it is impossible to determine whether programs have actually implemented the instrument or rated it based on what they have read in the literature or heard from colleagues. As illustrated in Table 4, grades in major course work were used by the largest number of criminal justice programs to measure student learning, yet this assessment technique was not ranked the highest in its effectiveness in evaluating how well students achieve learning objectives. Nearly 86 percent of the programs rated grades as "very effective" or "somewhat effective." Survey of students was the next most often used technique, but this technique was rated by 91 percent of the programs as "very effective" or "somewhat effective."

The top seven assessment measures in terms of usage included: grades in course work (80%), survey of students (79%), internship (75%), observation by faculty members (72%), survey of departmental alumni (69%), survey of employer/internship supervisor (67%), and senior seminar or capstone course (66%) with two-thirds or more of the programs indicating that these instruments were used in their programs. The top seven assessment methods in terms of their effectiveness of measuring student learning included: survey of employer/internship supervisor (92%), Major Field Test (92%), survey of students (91%), case study analysis (91%), rubric (90%), post-test only (90%),

Table 4
Assessment Instruments Used by the Programs and the Rating of Each Instrument

Assessment Instrument	Institutions Using Instrument	Institutions Not Using Instrument	Very Effective	Somewhat Effective	Neither Effective Nor Ineffective	Somewhat Ineffective	Very Ineffective
Grades in major course work	80.3% (49)	19.7% (12)	55.1% (27)	30.6% (15)	10.2% (5)	2% (1)	2% (1)
Survey of students	78.9% (45)	21.1% (12)	40% (18)	51.1% (23)	6.7% (3)	2.2% (1)	0% (0)
Internship	75.4% (46)	24.6% (15)	52.2% (24)	37% (17)	8.7% (4)	2.2% (1)	0% (0)
Observation by faculty members	71.9% (41)	28.1% (16)	46.3% (19)	36.6% (15)	14.6% (6)	0% (0)	2.4% (1)
Survey of department alumni	68.9% (42)	31.1% (19)	28.6% (12)	52.4% (22)	7.1% (3)	2.4% (1)	9.5% (4)
Survey of employer / internship supervisor	67.2% (39)	32.8% (19)	53.8% (21)	38.5% (15)	7.7% (3)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Senior seminar or capstone course	66.1% (41)	33.9% (21)	51.2% (21)	36.6% (15)	2.4% (1)	4.9% (2)	4.9% (2)
Rubric	56.4% (31)	43.6% (24)	38.7% (12)	51.6% (16)	6.5% (2)	0% (0)	3.2% (1)
Pre-test / post-test	50% (29)	50% (29)	62.1% (18)	17.2% (5)	6.9% (2)	6.9% (2)	6.9% (2)
Exit interview	46.3% (25)	53.7% (29)	32% (8)	56% (14)	0% (0)	0% (0)	12% (3)
Major Field Test	44.6% (25)	55.4% (31)	32% (8)	60% (15)	8% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Senior research project (with data collection and analysis)	43.6% (24)	56.4% (31)	62.5% (15)	16.7% (4)	8.3% (2)	8.3% (2)	4.2% (1)
Case study analysis	40.7% (22)	59.3% (32)	54.5% (12)	36.4% (8)	4.5% (1)	0% (0)	4.5% (1)
Post-test only	37.7% (20)	62.3% (33)	25% (5)	65% (13)	10% (2)	0% (0)	0% (0)
Portfolio	29.6% (16)	70.4% (38)	25% (4)	50% (8)	6.3% (1)	6.3% (1)	12.5% (2)

and internship (89%), with about 90 percent or more of the programs indicating that these techniques were "very effective" or "somewhat effective."

The top seven assessment measures in terms of usage included: grades in course work (80%), survey of students (79%), internship (75%), observation by faculty members (72%), survey of departmental alumni (69%), survey of employer/internship supervisor (67%), and senior seminar or capstone course (66%) with two-thirds or more of the programs indicating that these instruments were used in their programs. The top seven assessment methods in terms of their effectiveness of measuring student learning included: survey of employer/internship supervisor (92%), Major Field Test (92%), survey of students (91%), case study analysis (91%), rubric (90%), post-test only (90%), and internship (89%), with about 90 percent or more of the programs indicating that these techniques were "very effective" or "somewhat effective."

Analysis of Assessment Data

This section consisted of three questions that inquired about the collection and analysis of data generated by assessment activities in criminal justice programs. For the most part, the chair (36.1%), a designated faculty member (33%), or the faculty in general (16.5%) were the individuals responsible for gathering and analyzing the data produced by the learning assessment instruments. The departmental secretary was responsible in about five percent of the programs and just over nine percent chose "other" (e.g., assessment committee; assessment director). Criminal justice programs collected and analyzed data for assessment purposes each semester or term (44.8%), once a year

(41.8%), on a multi-year cycle (10.4%), or "other" (e.g., upon development of each iteration of assessment tools; twice a semester with the dean) (3%).

In nearly half (49.5%) of the responding criminal justice programs, results of the analysis of assessment data were reported to faculty members in the form of a written report. The remaining programs presented the results at faculty meetings (33%), "other" (e.g., shared with committees; emails with adjuncts; posting to websites; university presentations) (14.4%), or presented the results at departmental retreats (3.1%).

Institutional Environment

The last set of close-ended questions asked respondents about how assessment is viewed and funded by their institution. The external and internal pushes for assessment are apparent in this research with 88 percent of the programs indicating that the regional organization that accredits their institution has made student learning assessment a high or somewhat high priority. Almost 94 percent reported that the administration of their institution has made learning assessment a high or somewhat high priority.

The last two questions in the survey focused on institutional resources made available to assist with assessment. More than one-quarter (25.8%) of the programs reported that no resources were available for assessment purposes, while only about 14 percent reported that substantial resources were available. Over one-third (36.4%) of the programs were part of institutions that made some resources available, and about another quarter (24.2%) had few resources available. When asked to clarify what kinds of resources the institutions made available, the following were selected in rank order: on-campus workshops (25.2%), travel to off-campus workshops or conferences (22%), none

(17.1%), on-campus centers on teaching and learning (15.4%), course release time (9.8%), financial compensation (5.7%), and "other" (e.g., assessment director; staff from the dean's office; faculty/staff support) (4.9%).

Application of Learning Assessment Results

Respondents were also asked three open-ended questions regarding changes they had made in their majors, curricula, and/or instruction as a result of learning assessment. It was found that many of the criminal justice programs that have been involved in assessment have approached it as a process. Specifically, these programs are using their assessment results to make changes in the major (e.g., changes to major requirements), modify course offerings (e.g., added or dropped courses), and revise specific courses, specifically related to instruction (e.g., more focus on research methods or information technology). Although there seems to be some confusion in the distinctions made in each category, the point is to document the "process" of assessment – that assessment plans should involve some type of "feedback loop" that serves to modify and improve the program based upon results of the assessment activities. The following are the most commonly reported examples of what programs are doing in each area as a result of learning assessment:

Changes made in major:

- General revision of major requirements and curriculum
- Made capstone course a requirement
- Added or dropped courses in major
- Added a concentration in criminal justice/eliminated emphasis areas

- No significant changes made in major as a result of assessment

Modification in course offerings:

- General revision to curriculum
- Added or dropped courses from the curriculum
- Added/redesigned senior seminar and capstone course
- No significant changes made in course offerings as a result of assessment

Revision of specific courses:

- More emphasis on writing, critical thinking, and analytical skills
- Greater use of information technology
- Increased the focus on theory
- Greater use of statistical/quantitative measures in research methods
- Added more practical application to the coursework requirements
- No significant changes made in instruction as a result of assessment

Discussion of Criminal Justice Survey Results

As previously discussed, the top two learning objectives for criminal justice programs were to develop critical thinking skills (95.9%) and writing skills (88.7%), and the most commonly used assessment instrument was grades in major coursework (80.3%). It is argued, however, that grades do not serve as the most effective way to measure critical thinking skills or writing skills of students. In fact, using grades in major coursework to assess any aspect of student learning has been criticized by a number of assessment scholars in higher education. Critics contend that grades do not explicitly

reveal a student's strengths and weaknesses, nor do they signify which student learning objectives are (or are not) being satisfied, thereby making it difficult to know what changes to make to the curriculum and/or instruction to ultimately enhance the educational experiences of students, particularly their learning. Although grades in major coursework can provide useful information about a student's knowledge and familiarity of certain subject areas, solely using them as an assessment tool often makes it difficult for faculty to determine what a student may or may not have fully understood.

The responses to the questions that fall under the category of "institutional environment" are somewhat concerning as more than one-quarter (25.8%) of the criminal justice programs reported that their institutions made no resources available to them for assessment purposes, and when asked to indicate what types of resources were available, 17 percent reported none. For decades now, demands have been and continue to be placed on colleges and universities and the programs within to be accountable to their audiences and prove that they are producing students who know what a college graduate should know and can do what a college graduate should be able to do. Without adequate resources, however, it is unlikely that academic programs are able to carry out such assessment activities that will meet these demands.

About 86 percent (140/162) of criminal justice programs in this sample are, to some degree, engaged in student learning assessment. Some of these programs are following the "ideal type" of learning assessment model by developing a set of learning objectives that are aligned with the curriculum, creating and implementing assessment instruments, regularly collecting and analyzing data generated by the assessment

instruments, and making changes to improve the curriculum/instruction based on results of the data analysis. While there has been varying degrees of effort and involvement in each area, programs are essentially using the results of their assessment activities to improve the curriculum, teaching methods, and overall student learning, the fundamental purpose of assessment in higher education.

The next section describes the results from two studies conducted in previous years to determine how student learning is assessed in political science and public relations programs in higher education.

Summary Results from Political Science and Public Relations Studies

The survey used for this criminal justice research was adapted from the survey used in Kelly and Klunk's (2003) study that focused on student learning assessment in political science departments in colleges and universities across the United States. Naturally, these two survey instruments share many of the same types of questions. While fewer variables in Rybacki and Lattimore's (1999) international study about student outcomes assessment in undergraduate and graduate public relations programs are similar to those formulated in this research, these two studies share one of the most important variables – they both rate the effectiveness of assessment instruments used in the two social science disciplines. Figure 3 illustrates these similarities.

Figure 3
Common Assessment Variables Found in Three Areas of Social Science Research

Assessment Variable	Criminal Justice	Political Science	Public Relations
Type of program/department	✓	✓	✓
Number of majors	✓	✓	
Accrediting association	✓	✓	
Percent of programs/departments conducting learning assessment	✓	✓	✓
Stage in developing learning objectives	✓	✓	
Adopted learning objectives	✓	✓	
Stage in developing assessment instruments	✓	✓	
Adopted assessment instruments	✓	✓	✓
Rating of assessment instruments	✓		✓
Available resources for assessment programs	✓	✓	
Changes made to curriculum/instruction as a result of assessment	✓	✓	✓

Political Science

The majority of the political science departments (64.2%) that responded the questionnaire offer an undergraduate major only, while nearly 35 percent offer a graduate degree in political science. The largest group of respondents (30.2%) consisted of departments that offer undergraduate work only and have five or fewer faculty members. Almost 19 percent were departments in which political science is combined with other disciplines. Fifteen percent or less of the departments offer undergraduate programs only and have five or more faculty members (15.1%), offer graduate work and have 11 to 20 faculty members (13.7%), and offer graduate work and have ten or fewer faculty members (10.8%).

A small majority of the political science departments (51.5%) had more than 75 majors, and just under half (46.8%) had 75 or fewer majors. The number of majors

ranged from 75 to 150 in nearly one-quarter (24.1%) of the programs, representing the largest number of responses to this particular question.

One-third (33.5%) of the political science departments reside within institutions that are regionally accredited by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, and more than one-quarter (27.4%) are accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools. The remaining departments are part of institutions accredited by the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (17.5%), Western Association of Schools and Colleges (9.9%), Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities (5.2%), and New England Association of Schools and Colleges (4.7%).

Nearly 40 percent of political science departments reported that they had formally adopted a set of learning objectives, while about 45 percent had not done so. Of those that had not formally adopted a set of learning objectives, over 12 percent were discussing learning objectives and 16 percent were in the process of formulating learning objectives, leaving another 16 percent that were not even discussing learning objectives. Approximately 14 percent were reviewing or revising a previously adopted set of learning objectives.

Political science departments were asked to choose from a list of 14 specific learning objectives to indicate the ones they had formally adopted in their respective department. In over half of the departments, students should develop writing (57.1%) and critical thinking skills (55.7%) and become familiar with major theories and analytical approaches in political science (54%). Close to one-quarter (22.2%) to 46 percent indicated that the following learning objectives had been adopted in the

departments: become familiar with the major subfields of political science (46%), understand the international dimensions of political problems and policies (46%), be able to design and conduct political science research projects (40.8%), develop reading skills (36.3%), be able to use quantitative and statistical approaches to political science (35.5%), understand normative approaches to political problems and policies (31.3%), develop skills in making public presentations (30.7%), develop information technology skills (30.7%), understand ethnic, gender, or cultural dimensions of political problems and policies (26.5%), and acquire practical experience in politics or government (22.2%). With the exception of the "other" category (8%), developing a fundamental understanding of cognate disciplines like history, economics, or geography (15.6%) was the learning objective adopted by the fewest number of departments. Finally, about 19 percent of respondents indicated that this set of questions was not applicable to them. This percentage seems somewhat low given that nearly 30 percent of political science departments reported that they were not even in the process of formulating departmental learning objectives.

Political science departments were also asked to indicate which assessment instruments were being used to measure student achievement toward established learning objectives. Approximately 63 percent of respondents said that they had formally adopted assessment instruments, were in the process of formulating them, or were reviewing previously developed instruments. The senior capstone course was used by the largest percentage of departments (39.6%), while only ten percent reportedly used the pre-test/post-test to assess the learning of political science majors. Fourteen percent to one-

quarter of departments used the following instruments to assess student learning: faculty observation (25%), exit interview (24.1%), survey of students (22.2%), senior research project (20.3%), portfolio (17.9%), post-test only (14.2%), and "other" (12.3%). Nearly 18 percent of departments indicated that this question did not apply to them. Again, this percentage seems somewhat low as over 31 percent said they were not even in the process of formulating learning assessment tools.

The last set of close-ended questions dealt with the availability of resources to support political science departments in their assessment efforts. Only about five percent of responding departments indicated that there were substantial resources available to support learning assessment, while more than one-quarter (25.9%) reported that no resources were available for this purpose. Nearly one-third (32.5%) said that there were some resources available, and few resources were available for assessment activities in almost another third (31.6%). The following types of resources were reportedly made available to political science departments in support of learning assessment: on-campus workshops (39.6%), off-campus workshops (29.7%), on-campus teaching centers (28.8%), financial awards (7.1%), and course release time (5.7%).

Finally, political science departments were asked a series of open-ended questions about any changes that were made in their political science departments as a result of learning assessment. Results indicated that 37 percent of departments had made no significant changes in their major as a result of learning assessment, while 19 percent made a general revision to their major requirements and four percent created new majors, tracks, or emphases. In an attempt to address perceived student deficiencies in analytical

techniques and research methods, some departments added a required methods course or required students to take the course as sophomores rather than at the end of the program. Another 17 percent of departments added or revised a senior seminar or capstone course to help students address these deficiencies. Because senior seminar and capstone courses is the most frequently used assessment instruments among responding political science departments, it is not possible to determine whether a department is using this particular technique to help students address these deficiencies, assess student learning, or both.

A large group of responding political science departments (31.5%) added courses, while a much smaller group (12.8%) dropped courses as a result of learning assessment. Another common response from departments was that they added or significantly revised a research methods course based on learning assessment results. The most popular revision in specific courses was increasing the use of information technology as one-quarter of the departments made this change. Furthermore, departments placed a greater emphasis on research and analytical skills (21.5%), writing skills (14%), communication skills (4%), and critical thinking skills (1.5%). Overall, more than half of the political science departments offering undergraduate degrees only and 45 percent of departments offering graduate work are involved, at some stage, in the learning assessment process (Kelly and Klunk, 2003).

Public Relations

As shown in Figure 3, this criminal justice research and the study about learning assessment in public relations programs have five main variables in common: description of programs in each sample, percent of programs conducting learning assessment,

instruments used to assess student learning, the perceived effectiveness of each assessment instrument, and changes made to the curriculum/instruction as a result of assessment. Exactly half or 78 of the public relations programs responding to the international survey are located in institutions that offer an undergraduate degree only, and the other half offer both an undergraduate and graduate degree (45%) or a graduate degree only (5%). Over 40 percent of the responding public relations educators reported the existence of a plan to assess student outcomes at their institution, but just over half (56.3%) of these respondents indicated that the plan had actually been used to collect data. This denotes that fewer than one in four public relations academic programs have conducted outcomes assessment. Furthermore, fewer than one in four (22.7%) of the 97 public relations practitioners who also responded to the survey have been involved in some way as assessors of student learning.

Respondents were given the opportunity to indicate which of the 17 assessment instruments provided in the questionnaire were being used in their public relations programs to assess student learning outcomes. Grades in major coursework (77.6%) and a capstone experience (71.6%), such as an internship, were by far the most frequently utilized assessment tools. Exactly half of the respondents used a simulation or case study analysis, while just under half employed a faculty-evaluated presentation (49.3%), portfolio review (47%), survey of alumni satisfaction (44.6%), and record of graduate job placement (43.9%). The remaining assessment instruments used to assess public relations students included: survey of senior satisfaction (37.9%), faculty-authored written graduation exam (31.8%), exit interview (30.8%), practitioner-evaluated

presentation (23.9%), record of graduate school placement (20.9%), survey of employer satisfaction (18.5%), external professional board evaluation of program (13.4%), faculty-authored oral graduation examination (10.6%), external professional board evaluation of students (6%), and post-graduation certification exam (3%).

After respondents indicated the methods they were using to assess student learning outcomes, both educators and practitioners of public relations were asked to assign a value (1 through 7, with 1 being the lowest and 7 being the highest) to each assessment technique based on their perception of its effectiveness. The assessment instruments previously mentioned are presented in rank order (categorizations differ slightly) and accompanied by a combined value ascribed by educators and practitioners: internship or practicum (6.12), survey of employer satisfaction (5.84), survey of alumni satisfaction (5.66), simulation or case study analysis (5.62), portfolio review by practitioners (5.35), grades in major course work (5.30), performance review by practitioners (5.19), record of job placement (5.18), performance review by faculty (5.17), portfolio review by faculty (5.09), survey of senior satisfaction (5.02), exit interview (4.63), post-graduation certification exam (4.46), department-authored exam (4.31), record of graduate school placement (4.30), visiting or external advisory board evaluation (4.27), and standardized written graduation exam (4.18).

Finally, for the public relations programs that reportedly collected assessment data and used it to stimulate change, 62 percent indicated that they had used the data to revise their curriculum, and 31 percent modified their methods of teaching. The study, however, did not provide specific changes made as a result of assessment efforts.

Now that all of the learning assessment data have been described, the next section provides a comparison of the criminal justice data and the results from the political science and public relations studies just discussed. Also included are observations made about the results of the comparative analysis.

Discussion of Data Comparison

The information in this section is introduced under five main headings: demographic information, student learning objectives, assessment instruments, resources available for assessment purposes, and application of learning assessment results. These categories correlate with the variables shown in Figure 3 that are shared by the criminal justice, political science, and public relations assessment studies.

Demographic Information

As stated in the previous section and illustrated in the remaining tables and figures, the categories of the criminal justice data are more similar to political science rather than public relations because the survey used in this research was adapted from the one used in the political science study. Table 5 shows that the ratios of undergraduate to graduate programs in the criminal justice and public relations sample were quite similar (about 50%), but the undergraduate programs represented almost two-thirds of the political science sample, and only about one-third offer a graduate degree. Additionally, political science departments were inclined to have more full-time faculty members than criminal justice programs, particularly in departments that offer graduate work in political science. About 30 percent of criminal justice programs offering graduate work have ten

or fewer full-time faculty members, and almost one-quarter (23.6%) of political science departments have 11 or more full-time faculty members with ten percent having over 20 faculty. Furthermore, nearly 20 percent of political science departments are combined with other disciplines, while only about five percent of criminal justice programs fall into this category.

Table 5
Comparison of Demographic Information

Demographic Information	Criminal Justice	Political Science	Public Relations
Type of Program/Department	(n=94)[a]	(n=213)[b]	(n=156)[b]
Offers undergraduate major only	52.1%	64.2%	50%
has 5 or fewer full-time faculty	35.1%	30.2%	
has over 5 full-time faculty	11.7%	15.1%	
Offers graduate major	47.9%	34.4%	50%
has 10 or fewer full-time faculty	31.9%	10.8%	
has 11 to 20 full-time faculty	11.7%	13.7%	
has over 20 full-time faculty	4.3%	9.9%	
Program/Department combined with other disciplines	5.3%	18.9%	
Number of Majors	(n=95)[a]	(n=213)[b]	
Fewer than 20	38.1%	12.3%	
21 – 50	5.4%	18.9%	
51 – 75	2.7%	15.6%	N/A
76 – 150	12.9%	24.1%	
151 – 200	4.1%	9%	
More than 200	36.7%	18.4%	
Accrediting Association	(n=146)	(n=213)[b]	
MSA	17.5%	17.1%	
NEASC	4.7%	11%	
NCA	33.5%	34.9%	N/A
NWCCU	5.2%	4.1%	
SACS	27.4%	26.7%	
WASC	9.9%	6.2%	

[a] Includes four-year institutions only.
[b] Represents the total number of survey respondents. The sample size for each individual survey question was unavailable.

Approximately three-quarters of the undergraduate and graduate criminal justice programs either had fewer than 20 majors or more than 200 majors. The largest responding group of political science departments (24.1%) reported a range of 76 to 150 undergraduate and graduate majors. Just over half (51.5%) of the political science departments had more than 75 majors, and less than half (46.8%) had 75 or fewer majors.

The percentages of criminal justice programs and political science departments located in institutions that are accredited by each of the six regional accrediting associations are very similar. The most significant difference was that the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) accredits 11 percent of institutions that house the political science departments, whereas NEASC accredits less than half (4.7%) of this percentage of institutions that contain criminal justice programs.

Student Learning Objectives

In the criminal justice survey, there was one question at the beginning of the section on learning objectives that specifically asked respondents when their program started to assess student learning. Respondents were instructed to skip the remainder of the questionnaire if their program was not yet involved in student learning assessment. While there is no way to determine the number of programs that did skip the survey for this reason alone, 22 respondents specifically indicated that they were not involved in assessment. Thirteen programs indicated this through email and did not even start the survey, and nine programs indicated this in the survey. Survey data from eight respondents (one respondent followed directions and answered no more survey questions) from that point forward were removed from any further analysis. Thus, unlike the

political science and public relations studies, a large majority of the data that were analyzed came from programs that were fully involved in learning assessment activities. This explains why the proportion of criminal justice programs (86.4%) conducting student learning assessment is so much higher than the percentage of political science departments (~50%[2]) and public relations programs (23.9%) that are doing so.

In addition, data from 20 criminal justice respondents were removed from the analysis once they indicated that their program had not yet adopted a set of learning objectives, yet continued to participate in the survey after being instructed otherwise. Based on the "ideal type" of learning assessment model where the first step is to develop a set of learning objectives, it seems impossible to carry out any assessment efforts without first formulating and adopting student learning objectives. The data provided by these 20 respondents up until this question regarding learning objectives, however, were included in the analysis. As shown in Table 6, over 80 percent of criminal justice programs have adopted a set of learning objectives, while just over half (52.4%) of the political science departments have done so. Again, the criminal justice value is significantly higher because respondents were instructed to skip the remainder of the questionnaire if they had not adopted a set of learning objectives, and the data from those who had not yet adopted learning objectives but continued to complete the survey were removed from further analysis.

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[2] The political science study provided only individual percentages of undergraduate departments (over 50%) and graduate departments (45%) that were involved in assessment, so an "average" of the two is provided to represent a total value.

Table 6
Comparison of Student Learning Objectives

Student Learning Objectives	Criminal Justice	Political Science	Public Relations
Percent that have adopted a set of learning objectives	81.1% (n=122)	52.4% (n=213)[a]	N/A
Five most commonly adopted learning objectives	Critical thinking skills Writing skills Theories/analytical approaches Subfields Communication skills	Writing skills Critical thinking skills Theories/analytical approaches Subfields International dimensions	N/A

[a] Represents the total number of survey respondents. The sample size for each individual survey question was unavailable.

Also shown in Table 6 are the five most commonly adopted student learning objectives, in rank order, for criminal justice programs and political science departments. These two disciplines share four of the five learning objectives listed in Table 6. Interestingly, the two most popular learning objectives in criminal justice and political science – critical thinking and writing skills – are general learning expectations of students, rather than learning objectives specific to the field of criminal justice or political science.

Assessment Instruments

Criminal justice respondents who had not yet implemented an instrument used to assess student learning outcomes when the survey was administered were also asked to skip the rest of the questionnaire. Data from a total of 25 respondents who indicated that their program had not yet implemented an assessment instrument but continued to fill out the questionnaire were also removed from any further analysis. Again, it seems

impossible for programs that have not put the assessment instruments to use to rate their effectiveness or provide information about the data generated from these instruments or the results of their assessment efforts. Therefore, as portrayed in Table 7, the percentage of criminal justice programs (79.2%) that have adopted or are in the process of formulating assessment instruments is somewhat larger than the percentage of political science departments (62.8%) that were at this particular stage in the process.

As previously stated, about 86 percent of the criminal justice programs reported their involvement in student learning assessment. However, the number of programs that are fully engaged in the assessment process is significantly less than that. When taking into consideration the 53 cases excluded from the data analysis because the respondents were not involved in at least one of the pertinent stages of the assessment process (e.g., no learning objections had been adopted and/or no assessment instruments had been implemented), about 59 percent (95/162) of the responding criminal justice programs are following the ideal assessment steps that are necessary in order to generate curricular and instructional improvements that enhance student learning and development. Regardless of this smaller proportion, it appears as if criminal justice programs are assessing student learning to a somewhat higher degree than political science departments and public relations programs, as indicated in Table 6.

Table 7 also includes the five most frequently used assessment instruments in all three social sciences, and the five highest rated assessment instruments in criminal justice and public relations programs, both in rank order. The latter information was not provided in the political science study. The only commonly used assessment technique

shared by all three disciplines is a student presentation or performance observed by faculty members. Criminal justice and political science also have student surveys in common. The most frequently used assessment instrument in political science departments, a capstone course, is recognized as an effective measure of skills that students will need after graduation like writing and critical thinking skills, which were the two learning objectives adopted by the largest percentage of responding political science departments. On the contrary, grades in major coursework, the assessment method used by the largest number of criminal justice programs, are not a well known measure of critical thinking and writing skills, also the most popular learning objectives among criminal justice programs.

Including faculty observations, criminal justice and public relations programs shared three of the five most commonly used assessment instruments listed in Table 7. The other two, grades and internships, were not among the list of frequently used assessment tools in political science departments unless an internship fell under the category of a capstone course as it did in the public relations study. However, there is no way to determine if this is true for political science. Grades in major coursework were the most frequently used assessment method in both criminal justice and public relations programs. The absence of grades in the list of assessment instruments from which political science departments could choose does not indicate that these departments do not use grades as assessment measures. It only means that the survey authors controlled for it by not giving it as a choice in their questionnaire.

Table 7
Comparison of Assessment Instruments

Assessment Instruments	Criminal Justice	Political Science	Public Relations
Percent that have adopted or are formulating assessment instruments	79.2% (n=96)	62.8% (n=213)[a]	N/A
Five most frequently used assessment instruments	Grades Survey of students Internship Faculty observation Survey of alumni	Capstone course Faculty observation Exit interview Survey of students Senior research project	Grades Capstone experience Simulation or case study analysis Faculty-evaluated presentation Portfolio review
Five highest rated assessment instruments[b]	Survey of employer/ internship supervisor Major Field Test Survey of students Case study analysis Rubric	N/A	Internship or practicum Survey of employer Survey of alumni Simulation or case study analysis Portfolio review by practitioners

[a] Represents the total number of survey respondents. The sample size for each individual survey question was unavailable.
[b] Represents the five highest rated assessment instruments based on the combined percentages of criminal justice programs that rated the instruments as very effective or somewhat effective. In public relations, the ratings are based on a combined value assigned to each instrument by educators and practitioners.

Criminal justice and public relations programs were given the opportunity to rate each assessment instrument used in their respective programs based on how effective they perceived each method to be in measuring student achievement toward established learning objectives. As shown in Table 7, employer surveys and simulations or case study analyses were highly rated in both disciplines. In addition, a portfolio review was the fifth most commonly used assessment technique in public relations programs, and a portfolio review by practitioners was the fifth most highly rated tool in this discipline. Although not visible in Table 7 but significant enough to justify a brief mention, a portfolio was employed by the fewest number of criminal justice programs with only 30

percent using it to assess student learning. These programs also rated the portfolio as the least effective assessment instrument as nearly 20 percent categorized it as "somewhat effective" or "very ineffective," there are a number of documented testimonies that the portfolio is a technique that can provide sufficient evidence of what a student has learned.

Perhaps the most interesting observation is that grades were the most frequently used assessment instrument in both criminal justice and public relations programs, yet neither group rated this technique in the top five ways to assess learning outcomes. This rating is consistent with the research pertaining to the use of grades for assessment purposes. A substantial number of critics have argued that using grades in major coursework alone for assessment purposes is not an effective measure of learning because grading standards are extremely wide-ranging, and it is difficult for instructors to determine what material or subject matter has or has not been mastered by the students.

Another interesting, yet concerning observation is that only one of the assessment instruments most frequently used in criminal justice programs, a survey of students, was also one of the five highest rated means that these programs used to measure student learning. Furthermore, surveys are indirect methods of assessment, which according to a review of the literature, are less effective means of measuring student learning. Indirect methods, unlike direct methods, are based on perceptions (by students or others) of student achievement and do not require students to demonstrate that they have met a particular learning goal.

Resources Available for Assessment Purposes

Data related to the amount and type of resources made available for assessment purposes are presented in Table 8 for criminal justice and political science only. This information was not provided in the public relations study. Exactly half of the criminal justice programs reported that their institutions have made substantial or some resources available for assessment purposes, although almost three-quarters of these respondents indicated that some resources were available. The other half equally reported having few or no resources available for assessment purposes. Similarly, the largest single group of political science respondents (32.5%) indicated that some resources were available for learning assessment. While the proportion of criminal justice programs (25.8%) and political science departments (25.9%) that reported no available assessment resources was almost identical, there is a significant difference in the percentages that said substantial resources were available.

Although both values are small, the proportion of criminal justice programs (13.6%) located in institutions that provide substantial resources to assist these programs with learning assessment efforts is two and a half times greater than the percentage of political science departments (5.2%) that have substantial resources for such purposes. Based on these data, criminal justice programs are doing slightly better than political science departments in terms of the availability of learning assessment resources.

When asked about the types of resources made available for assessment purposes, the largest group of criminal justice programs (25.2%) and political science departments (39.6%) indicated that their institutions provided on-campus workshops for faculty and

staff involved in student learning assessment. Off-campus workshops were the second most widely available assessment resources in both criminal justice programs (22%) and political science departments (29.7%), and on-campus teaching centers (28.8%) ran a very close third in political science departments. Approximately 17 percent of criminal justice programs reported that no type of resources were made available by their institutions for assessment purposes, but this particular category of data was not provided in the political science study. Course release time and financial compensation were the least widely available types of assessment resources in criminal justice programs and political science departments.

Table 8
Comparison of Resources Available for Assessment Purposes

Assessment Resources	Criminal Justice	Political Science	Public Relations
Availability of Resources	(n=66)	(n=213)[a]	
Substantial resources	13.6%	5.2%	
Some resources	36.4%	32.5%	N/A
Few resources	24.2%	31.6%	
No resources	25.8%	25.9%	
Types of Available Resources[b]	(n=64)	(n=213)[a]	
Course release time	9.8%	5.7%	
Financial compensation	5.7%	7.1%	
On-campus workshops	25.2%	39.6%	
Off-campus workshops	22%	29.7%	N/A
On-campus teaching centers	15.4%	28.8%	
None	17.1%	N/A	
Other	4.9%	N/A	

[a] Represents the total number of survey respondents. The sample size for each individual survey question was unavailable.

[b] It is assumed that political science departments were given the opportunity to select multiple answers in this particular question since the values total a sum greater than 100%. Criminal justice programs could select all that apply, but the percentages were calculated using the total number of responses rather than the total number of respondents, so the sum equals 100%.

Application of Learning Assessment Results

The application of results generated by learning assessment activities is the final stage of the process and often the one most likely to not be addressed or performed. An assessment program that does not affect change that ultimately leads to improvement of student learning and instruction, as scholars insist, is a waste of resources. Figure 4 shows the three most popular responses to three different inquiries regarding the application of learning assessment results. Criminal justice and political science respondents were asked to list the most significant changes that were made in their major as a result of learning assessment. The most common response to this question by both groups of respondents was no change, followed by a general revision to major requirements. The third most commonly reported change in the major was the addition of a required capstone course in criminal justice programs and a required research methods course in political science departments.

Criminal justice and political science departments were then asked to identify the most significant changes made in their course offerings as a result of learning assessment. Again, many of the responses were vague, yet very similar, as both criminal justice programs and political science departments indicated that they had added courses, dropped courses, and added/revised a senior capstone and seminar course and a research methods course, respectively. While no specific changes were identified in the public relations study, it did reveal that of the programs that actually used their assessment plans to collect data (24%), over 60 percent made changes to their curriculum.

Figure 4
Comparison of Applications of Learning Assessment Results

Changes Made as a Result of Learning Assessment	Criminal Justice	Political Science	Public Relations
Three Most Commonly Reported Changes Made in Major	No change General revision of major requirements Made capstone course a requirement	No change General revision of major requirements Made research methods and capstone course a requirement	See cells below
Three Most Commonly Reported Modifications in Course Offerings	Added courses Dropped courses Added/revised senior seminar and capstone course	Added courses Dropped courses Added/revised research methods course	No specific changes identified, but 62.2% changed their curriculum
Three Most Commonly Reported Revisions of Specific Courses/ Instruction	More emphasis on: Writing skills Critical thinking and analytical skills Greater use of information technology	Greater use of information technology More emphasis on: Research and analytical skills Writing skills	No specific changes identified, but 30.6% changed their teaching methods

Finally, criminal justice programs and political science departments were asked to report the most significant changes made to specific courses, specifically related to methods of instruction, as a result of learning assessment. With the exception of the order of rank, the responses to this question were practically identical as both groups of respondents indicated a greater use of information technology and more emphasis on analytical and writing skills. There was also a greater focus placed on critical thinking skills, but more so in criminal justice programs than in political science departments. Again, no specific changes were identified in the public relations study, but of the programs that used the assessment results for improvement, over 30 percent made changes to their methods of teaching. While it is difficult to make definitive conclusions

about public relations based on the accessible data, it can be concluded that many of the responding criminal justice programs and political science departments that are involved in learning assessment have approached it as a process and, as a result, have made changes to what and how they are teaching their majors to improve overall student learning and development.

Chapter 5
Summary and Conclusions

This research focuses on student learning outcomes assessment in criminal justice programs in American colleges and universities. Particularly, this research sought to establish a baseline understanding about how criminal justice programs are measuring student achievement toward learning outcomes. The baseline does not include what students *should* be learning or how that learning *should* be assessed; it includes only what is actually happening in criminal justice programs in terms of how student learning is being assessed.

An extensive review of assessment-related literature found that, due to state and federal mandates, new accreditation standards, and demands for more institutional accountability, assessment in higher education has gained popularity over the past two decades and is taking place on a growing number of college campuses (El-Khawas, 1989; 1992; 1995). Calls for accountability primarily originated in a number of reports that stressed the need for reform and improvement in higher education, specifically the need for more and better assessment of student learning as a way to meet these demands. The most significant reports were published in the 1980s, beginning in 1983, by various groups including the Education Commission of the States, National Commission on Excellence in Education, National Governors Association, National Institute of

Education, and the Association of American Colleges and Universities.

It was also discovered, through a literature review, that this research is the only attempt to establish a national baseline about how criminal justice programs in higher education are conducting student learning assessment. Not only is it the first effort to capture how learning assessment activities are carried out in criminal justice, it is one of very few studies that focus on learning assessment across an entire academic discipline rather than an individual program or institution. Studies similar to this research were conducted in political science (Kelly and Klunk, 2003), public relations (Rybacki and Lattimore, 1999), and business (Michlitsch and Sidle, 2002). The results from all three analyses were discussed in Chapter 2, and Chapter 4 contains a detailed comparison of the data generated by the criminal justice survey and the results included in the political science and public relations studies. Results from the study that focused on assessment in business schools were not directly compared to the criminal justice findings because business is a field of study that is usually not categorized as a social science. And this research focuses specifically on student learning assessment in the social sciences, which are collectively "a branch of science that deals with the institutions and functioning of human society and with the interpersonal relationships of individuals as members of society" (Merriam-Webster, 2005-2006). Other online definitions of social sciences were nearly identical to this one, and not one of them identified business as an area of study in social sciences. The disciplines that are included in the data comparisons provided in Chapter 4 of this research (criminal justice, political science, and public relations) are, however, recognized as major fields of study in the social sciences.

The population for this research included 834 two- and four-year accredited institutions of higher education that offer a degree in criminal justice/criminology. A sample of 360 colleges and universities was randomly generated by selecting every fourth institution from the sampling frame. An additional ten criminal justice programs (plus five that were already in the sample) recently reviewed by the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS) are also included in the sample. Because one institution was permanently removed from the sample, the total number of criminal justice professionals who were targeted fell from 370 to 360. Since the survey was web-based and would be sent to the sample electronically, institutional websites were searched to find the email addresses of criminal justice program directors or department chairs affiliated with the selected colleges and universities.

The online survey instrument used for this research was adapted from the mail survey used in Kelly and Klunk's (2003) study about learning assessment in political science departments in colleges and universities across the United States. The questionnaire consists of 30 questions that are aligned with the "ideal type" of learning assessment model where a set of learning objectives are developed, assessment instruments are created and implemented, data are regularly collected and analyzed, and changes are made to improve the curriculum/instruction. On three different occasions, a link to the survey and information about the research were emailed to criminal justice professionals in the sample resulting in a 44 percent return rate.

Major Research Findings in Criminal Justice

An analysis of the data produced by the criminal justice learning assessment survey and a comparison of these data and the data presented in the political science and public relations assessment studies revealed several major research findings. The key findings in criminal justice are presented first.

First, the assessment instrument most commonly used in criminal justice programs was grades in major coursework, yet out of 15 assessment techniques, these programs ranked grades tenth in terms of their effectiveness in measuring student achievement toward established learning objectives. It is somewhat surprising that most of the criminal justice programs were using an assessment measure that was not rated the most effective when compared to other measures. Based on the literature, however, the perceived limited effectiveness and value associated with grades in major coursework as a way to measure student learning can be expected. While grading is a technique often used in all academic settings, from elementary to graduate schools, to determine what students know or do not know in a particular subject, many scholars argue that it does not provide sufficient evidence of student learning (Allen, 2004; James, 1994; Rybacki and Lattimore, 1999; Suskie, 2004). Specifically, using grades in major coursework alone to assess student learning often prevents faculty from being able to determine what a student has or has not mastered. This uncertainty can make it extremely difficult for faculty to make changes to their curricula and teaching methods that ultimately improve student learning and development, which is the principal reason for conducting assessment.

Another flaw in using grades to assess student learning is the lack of information they provide on how well students have developed and learned core competencies over the course of an entire program. Through various tests and assignments, grades give faculty information on student performance in individual courses, but they do not indicate a student's level of proficiency in fundamental competencies like critical thinking and writing skills (Suskie, 2004). Such a limitation is related to this research because developing critical thinking and writing skills were the most frequently adopted learning objectives in criminal justice programs, yet grades were most often used to measure these objectives. Student surveys, a close first runner-up in terms of usage and third in terms of effectiveness, are also criticized because they, like any type of survey used in assessment, provide indirect rather than direct evidence of student learning. Direct methods of assessment require students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills, while indirect methods are based on how well students feel they understand a certain topic.

Internships were also used by a large majority of criminal justice programs to measure how well their majors achieved learning objectives. Internship supervisors are often surveyed and asked to indicate their satisfaction with various aspects of the student's performance. While the use of surveys for assessment purposes is often criticized (as just discussed), surveys of internship supervisors can provide convincing evidence that an individual student has gained the knowledge and skills expected of him/her (Suskie, 2004). This is true because most internship experiences allow students to apply what they have learned in the classroom to "real-world" situations. For this same reason, employers of a program's alumni are often surveyed to collect data that

indicate how the overall success of the program and its graduates are perceived by an external assessor. With this being said, a survey of an employer/internship supervisor was the assessment instrument rated most effective (rated very or somewhat effective by largest percentage of programs) by criminal justice programs.

Another major research finding relates to the Major Field Test, which was rated by criminal justice programs as the second most effective assessment instrument (again, based on the percentage of programs that rated it very or somewhat effective), right behind a survey of employers/internship supervisors and right before student surveys. Published by the Educational Testing Service, the Major Field Test is a standardized, multiple-choice exam that institutions can purchase and administer to students in 16 different majors who are in their last semester. While this nationally-normed exam is used in more than 700 colleges and universities to measure what undergraduate seniors have learned in their field of study, the literature review found no evidence that it is an effective measure of student learning.

Before the Major Field Test in criminal justice was established, authors of a related case study pointed out that while the creation of a national exam for criminal justice could help faculty identify common curricular objectives, it also raises two major concerns. First, a national test might be used to make inappropriate and perhaps impossible demands on departments to provide evidence that they are meeting departmental goals. Second, the development of a national exam implies the need for a nationally standardized curriculum, which is problematic in criminal justice because most programs are considerably diverse in terms of student characteristics (age, educational

background, work experience, etc.) and offerings in major courses and concentration areas. Additionally, some criminal justice programs have limited capacities to support a major development like that of a new standardized test and curriculum (Veneziano and Brown, 1994).

Although not specific to criminal justice, the concern about a national curriculum was once again expressed as recently as February 9, 2006 in a *New York Times* article in response to the idea of whether a national standardized test should be administered in all colleges and universities for comparative purposes and to prove that students are learning. The article revealed that many educators are opposed to the notion of standardized testing for several reasons including the implicit need for national standards and a national curriculum if a single exam is implemented in higher education (Arenson, 2006). Another criticism of standardized exams highlighted in this article, as well as in other sources (Allen, 2004; Hoyt, 2001; Palomba and Banta, 1999), is students' lack of motivation to perform well or take the test seriously unless the results directly impact their academic success.

In addition, there are several more well-documented disadvantages of standardized tests. They often encourage faculty to "teach to the test" (Palomba and Banta, 1999, p. 154), disregarding the learning objectives that faculty value and students make an effort to achieve (Maki, 2004). Published tests consist mostly of multiple-choice items and are, therefore, not reflective of higher-order thinking skills like critical thinking and problem-solving (Allen, 2004; Diamond, 1998; Montgomery, 2002). Standardized tests lack validity as they do not always measure what a student has actually

learned (Heywood, 2000; Maki, 2004), and because they are primarily administered at the end of a course or program, standardized exams leave little or no room for improvement (Suskie, 2004).

The last major finding solely related to criminal justice deals with the institutional environment in which programs are operating. There is no question that assessment activities on college campuses are more prevalent now than they were two decades ago. While studies that focused on the prevalence of assessment in higher education are somewhat outdated and some results have been inconsistent, it is apparent that assessment is here to stay. Many institutions are taking part in assessment due to mandates at the state and federal level. Nearly all states require some form of assessment in their colleges and universities, albeit to varying levels of involvement by state legislatures (Bogue and Hall, 2003; Nettles et al., 1997), and all six regional accrediting associations have incorporated student learning assessment in their standards (McMurtrie, 2000; Nettles, 1997, 2003; Palomba and Banta, 1999). Often times, however, such efforts are required but not financially backed by bureaucrats who are responsible for initiating the order, resulting in "unfunded mandates."

Based on the survey findings in this research, unfunded mandates is a familiar concept in criminal justice programs as the vast majority reported that the regional organization that accredits their institution and the administration of their institution have made learning assessment a high or somewhat high priority. Nonetheless, over one-quarter of the programs reported that no resources were available for assessment purposes, and only about 14 percent reported that their institution made substantial

resources available for program-level assessment. Clearly, without adequate resources, it is unlikely that programs will be able to successfully implement an assessment plan that satisfies the stipulated criteria. In order for criminal justice programs to meet the growing assessment demands (internal and external) in higher education, the funding of such requirements must become a priority.

Major Research Findings in the Comparison of Social Sciences

There are also a few significant findings that resulted from the comparison of the criminal justice data and the data provided in the political science and public relations studies. Like in criminal justice, the largest percentage of public relations programs also used grades to assess student learning outcomes, but this assessment technique was not assigned the highest value. In the study, the authors specifically described this finding as troubling, noting that using grades as an assessment instrument fails to substantiate the attainment of individual course objectives (Rybacki and Lattimore, 1999). Also similar to criminal justice, the learning objectives most commonly adopted by political science departments comprised the development of writing and critical thinking skills. These learning objectives include skills that are considered general education competencies and are not specific to the discipline of criminal justice or political science.

When the criminal justice data were compared to the results from the political science study, it was also found that both types of academic units were operating in institutional environments that are less than desirable. One out of four criminal justice programs and political science departments is located in an institution that provides no

resources for assessment purposes. The majority of these programs and departments reside within institutions that make some or few resources available for assessment activities. Again, the presence of these funding (and personnel) deficiencies makes it extremely difficult for the smaller functioning components of institutions to meet requirements, like student learning assessment, that are placed upon them.

Finally, the most significant changes made in the major, course offerings, and instruction of the criminal justice programs and political science departments that fully engaged themselves in the assessment cycle were very similar. As a result of learning assessment, both disciplines added and dropped courses, are making greater use of information technology in the classroom, and have placed more emphasis on writing and analytical skills. Furthermore, a considerable number of criminal justice programs reported that they added or significantly revised a required capstone course in their major, signifying a positive development in criminal justice in terms of student learning assessment. Due to its focus on practical skills and focus on real-world situations, a senior seminar or capstone course has been identified in a number of references as an effective or appropriate method to assess student learning and provide important evidence that a program has achieved it overall learning goals (Allen, 2004; APA, 2002; CHEA, 2003a; Palomba and Banta, 1999; Seybert, 1994; Suskie, 2004).

When compared to political science and public relations, it appears that criminal justice as an entire discipline is up to par in terms of its overall involvement in assessment. This statement is based on several factors, mainly the proportion of criminal justice programs that are involved in student learning assessment and follow the ideal

type of learning assessment model where they complete the process by making changes to the program to improve its overall effectiveness, particularly in the area of student learning. This does not suggest, however, that criminal justice and other social science disciplines are conducting assessment on the same level as there are no data currently available to make such comparisons. Because this research is one of very few studies that focus on the current state of assessment across an entire discipline, it is impossible to accurately determine how criminal justice measures up to other fields of study.

There is an abundance of literature related to assessment in higher education in general, and there are descriptions of assessment efforts from individual institutions, departments, and programs in nearly every discipline (including criminal justice), especially in the hard sciences and in the subjects that are accredited. In addition, several assessment experts have written books devoted to case studies about assessment initiatives in various academic disciplines (mostly accredited disciplines) in colleges and universities across the country (Banta et al., 1996; Christ, 2006; Nichols, 1995; Palomba and Banta, 2001). Regardless of these categories of literature, the assessment scholarship in higher education – particularly research related to how student learning *is* being assessed and *should* be assessed in major areas of study – appears incomplete.

Limitations

There are several limitations of this research that should be noted. The first limitation relates to the sample size. A sample size of 263 was calculated based on the number of institutions in the population and a desire to say, with 95 percent confidence,

that the data generated by the random sample is representative of the target population. While the number of criminal justice programs that responded to the questionnaire (n=162) fell short of this value, the return rate obtained (44%) is considered excellent in web-based surveys (Tuten et al., 2002). Also, based on the ACJS membership figures, the sample acquired in this research is quite representative of the national distribution of criminal justice programs.

The second limitation of this research is the lack of assessment data from other social science disciplines. The goal of this research was to describe how criminal justice programs in colleges and universities are assessing student learning, and then to compare these results to how other fields in the social sciences are conducting student learning assessment. Only two studies (political science and public relations) were found that provided this category of learning assessment data for other social science disciplines (as an entire discipline rather than individual programs). Furthermore, with the exception of the study about assessing student learning outcomes in business schools, no similar studies were found that focused on learning assessment in areas of study beyond the social sciences. Thus, the comparison of the criminal justice data and the political science and public relations data provided in Chapter 4 is limited and does not represent all of the social sciences or disciplines outside of the social sciences.

Third, this research provides only a description of what is being done in criminal justice programs to assess student learning outcomes, not what should be happening in these programs in terms of assessment. Because there are no data that were collected to

evaluate their assessment approaches, there is no way to determine the level of effectiveness of the assessment efforts taking place in criminal justice programs.

Finally, there is no way to distinguish between the criminal justice programs that are not assessing student learning from the programs that are but chose not to complete the survey. In the final reminder email sent to criminal justice programs in the sample, programs that were not conducting assessment at that time were asked to respond to the email and specify that no assessment was taking place. There was also a statement near the beginning of the questionnaire instructing programs that were not assessing student learning to skip the remainder of the survey. A substantial number of programs indicated that they had not yet started to assess student learning, yet somehow managed to complete the survey. While data provided by these programs were eliminated from the analyses, it is impossible to determine the number of criminal justice programs that did not respond to the email or access the survey due to their lack of assessment activities (as opposed to those who do assess student learning but did not respond to the survey). This inability to identify the reason a sampling unit chooses not to participate in a questionnaire is considered a limitation in most survey research, and no recommendation for further research (short of another survey) can easily solve it.

Recommendations

There are three recommendations for further analysis related to this research and logically they are aligned with the limitations previously discussed. First, to address the smaller-than-desired sample size, a study similar to this research could be conducted in

the future but more criminal justice programs should be targeted. For a number of reasons, a high return rate was anticipated in this research. However, the number of actual responses did not equal the number of expected responses, resulting in a sample size smaller than what was originally sought. If similar research is performed in the future, it is recommended that when determining the number of programs to include in the sample, a return rate of no more than 50 percent should be anticipated as it was 44 percent in this research, which is considered excellent.

Second, additional research concerning how student learning is being assessed in higher education is needed to fully understand the status of assessment on college campuses. There is an abundance of literature about the "nuts and bolts" of assessment, but with the exception of some surveys about assessment trends in colleges and universities, a limited amount of work has been published that describes what is actually going on with assessment in higher education. Furthermore, a substantial number of institutions and individual programs have documented their assessment efforts, but the information pertaining to assessment activities across entire academic disciplines is scarce. Besides this research, only three studies were found in the literature that describe how student learning outcomes are being assessed throughout in a particular field of study (political science, public relations, and business). More research of this kind is needed in all branches of higher learning, including the social sciences, in order to paint a comprehensive picture about the various assessment activities taking place, and to allow individual disciplines to see where they stand in terms of their level of involvement in

assessment practices when compared to others, especially since assessment has been at the forefront of higher education policy for over 20 years.

The third and final recommendation relates to the notion of "best practices" when assessing student learning outcomes, particularly the most effective instruments in measuring students' attainment of learning objectives. It is important to understand that there are a number of factors, such as field of study, student characteristics, commitment of administrative and teaching faculty, available resources, and major learning goals that can affect the development and implementation of an assessment plan. Each assessment plan should be tailored to the academic unit about to engage in assessment based on these factors and others depending on any additional unique attributes a program or department may have. While the literature is full of references that discuss the "how to's" of general assessment and the advantages and disadvantages of the many assessment techniques that exist, there are no guidelines or best practices that are specifically developed for individual disciplines to follow when making the important decision about the method(s) on which to base their assessment efforts. This decision is especially of great consequence because the assessment instrument implemented will determine the type of data that is generated and analyzed and ultimately used to make changes to the curriculum and instruction to improve student learning and development.

In this research, criminal justice programs were asked to provide examples of significant changes that have been made to their major, course offerings, and methods of instruction in specific courses as a result of learning assessment. A way to determine what is working for programs in terms of assessment methods employed is to conduct

follow-up interviews with some of the program directors that responded to these questions to develop a better understanding of how they carried out assessment practices that ultimately led to positive change in their program. By definition, an assessment plan is truly effective only when faculty members apply the results produced by selected assessment instruments to improve student learning and development by enhancing their curricula and methods of teaching. Therefore, it is strongly believed that the criminal justice professionals who indicated curriculum/instruction modifications as a result of learning assessment have successfully completed each step of the process, and elements of their assessment plans should be incorporated into the list of best practices for conducting student learning outcomes assessment in criminal justice education.

Policy Implications

Based on some of the major findings, this research provides several essential considerations for policy implications. First, nearly every criminal justice program that responded to the question on the survey related to assessment instruments being used indicated that they use grades in major coursework to assess student learning. Some faculty may feel that assigning grades *is* assessing what their students are learning. Grades do reveal something about student learning, but because this technique does not indicate which major learning objectives a student has or has not achieved, the information provided is at a level that is too broad for meaningful assessment. Grades reflect knowledge of course-specific content (through exams and assignments), while assessment focuses on the attainment of departmental or program-level learning goals.

Regardless of such criticisms, grading is a technique used by instructors in all types of educational settings to measure what their student have or have not learned.

Having said this, criminal justice programs should begin to move away from using grades in individual courses as a method to measure student achievement of the broader learning objectives established by the program or department. Authentic assessment techniques that provide opportunities for students to perform real tasks using the knowledge and skills they have obtained during previous semesters are believed to be effective (Allen, 2004; Appelbaum, 1988; Birenbaum and Douchy, 1996; Nightingale et al., 1996; Palomba and Banta, 1999; Seybert, 1994; Suskie, 2004), especially in a professional discipline like criminal justice (Sgroi and Ryniker, 2002). These methods can include capstone courses, internships, case study analyses using real data, and senior research projects that include data collection and analysis. As previously mentioned in the chapter, a student's performance in a capstone course can provide compelling evidence of student learning as well as overall program success. Thus, the capstone course can be used in criminal justice and other professional programs for improvement and accreditation purposes, the two central reasons outcomes assessment is executed.

A scoring rubric could be employed to turn these tools into more effective learning assessment strategies because such a tool is capable of evaluating authentic performances where practical skills that students will need in the real world, like creative thinking, critical thinking, and problem-solving skills, are often applied (Allen, 2004; Montgomery, 2002; Stevens and Levi, 2005; Suskie, 2004). A rubric allows faculty to make judgments about each major characteristic or component of a student product or

performance, resulting in ratings that usually range from unacceptable or inadequate to exemplary or excellent. To give legitimacy to the process of moving away from grades and toward these authentic styles of assessment, an ACJS advocate of this assessment strategy could provide criminal justice educators with all of the necessary facts that enable them to make an informed decision.

Second, the use of standardized tests to measure student learning is continuously being criticized by educators and assessment scholars for a number of reasons (references previously cited in this chapter), yet almost half of the criminal justice programs that responded to the survey use the Major Field Test in criminal justice and over 90 percent that use this method rated it somewhat or very effective. By purchasing a test rather than creating their own method of assessment, faculty are not as involved in the process, which can often be viewed as taking the easy way out when it comes to student learning assessment. Programs that use the Major Field Test or other standardized, end-of-program exams face two major obstacles. First, some faculty feel forced to teach the students only what they will be tested on in order to increase the likelihood of satisfactory scores, which limits the curriculum and often ignores certain learning objectives that may have previously been adopted in the program. Second, program-level learning objectives must be aligned with the main test components in order to determine if students are actually attaining established learning goals. Again, this restricts the curriculum and allows an external source (the test publisher) to establish a universal curriculum and set of learning objectives that all programs that purchase a test of this nature are expected to follow. Faculty and staff must be fully committed to the assessment process and willing

to put forth the time and effort necessary to truly know what students are learning rather than being satisfied with the easy results. Based on what they find during the assessment process, faculty must use these findings to make revisions to the curriculum and instruction to improve student learning. However, if the curriculum and instruction are already predetermined as they are with many standardized tests, completing the full circle of assessment might be impossible.

The final policy implication relates to the revolution that has taken place in higher education, referring to the shift from an "instruction paradigm" to a "learning paradigm" (Barr and Tagg, 1995). Before the notion of "student learning" made its way into assessment practices, college and university faculty focused most of their efforts on providing instruction to students. Students went to class to hear lectures and if they did not understand what was being taught, it was their responsibility to "get it" rather than faculty making changes to the curriculum or their teaching methods. Under the current learning paradigm, which was shaped by various reports, state and federal demands for accountability, and new accreditation standards, educators focus on student learning. If students are not learning what is expected of them based on established learning objectives, faculty now work toward modifying their curricula and teaching methods to improve student learning rather than leaving it up to the students to adjust their learning style. Now that student learning is the center of most institutional missions, it is also a significant factor in an institution's overall effectiveness (Brown and Knight, 1994; Brown et al., 1997).

This educational shift that has occurred has affected institutions as well as the academic programs that operate within them. Although most programs, including criminal justice, are not individually accredited or externally pressured, they are still expected to operate in a manner that adheres to the mission and major goals of the institution, which more than likely involve the idea of producing educated graduates. Thus, criminal justice programs that are currently not assessing student learning must consider this transformation in higher education policy and adapt accordingly. Under the current learning paradigm, programs can accomplish this by providing evidence that their graduating students are "learned" and well-equipped with the knowledge and skills necessary to succeed after graduation.

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VCU

Appendix A
Initial IRB Approval

MCV Campus

Virginia Commonwealth University

Office of Research Subjects Protection

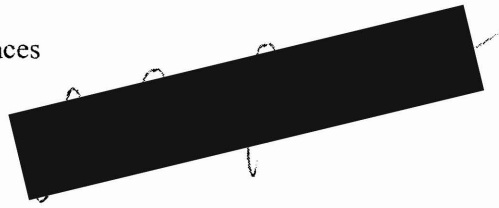
Sanger Hall, 1-023
1101 East Marshall Street
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, Virginia 23298-0568

804 828-0868
Fax: 804 827-1448
TDD: 1-800-828-1120

DATE: April 5, 2005

TO: Laura Moriarty, PhD
College of Humanities and Sciences
Box 842019

FROM: Lea Ann Hansen, PharmD
Chairperson, VCU IRB Panel D
Box 980568



RE: **VCU IRB #: 4375**
Title: Student Learning Assessment in the Social Sciences: Establishing a National Baseline for Criminal Justice

On March 31, 2005 the following research study ***qualified for exemption*** according to 45 CFR 46.101(b) Category 1. This determination includes the following items reviewed by this Panel:

RESEARCH APPLICATION/PROPOSAL: None

PROTOCOL: Student Learning Assessment in the Social Sciences: Establishing a National Baseline for Criminal Justice

CONSENT/ASSENT:
- Appendix B, Cover Letter, received 3/1/05

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS: None

This Institutional Review Board is in compliance with good clinical practices (GCP) as defined under the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and the International Conference on Harmonization (ICH) guidelines. Virginia Commonwealth University is approved by DHHS to conduct human subjects research under a Federal Wide Assurance #FWA00005287. **All correspondence related to this research study must include the IRB protocol number and the investigator's name(s) to assist us in locating your file.**

The Primary Reviewer assigned to your research study is Richard Gayle EdD. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Gayle at rgayle@vcu.edu or 828-1948; or you may contact Susan Kimbrough, IRB Coordinator, VCU Office of Research Subjects Protection, at sdkimbrough@vcu.edu or 827-1445.

Attachment – Terms of Approval

VCU

Appendix B
Final IRB Approval

MCV Campus

Virginia Commonwealth University

Office of Research Subjects Protection

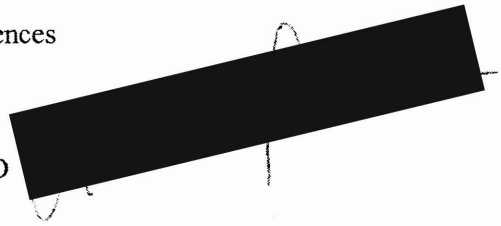
Sanger Hall, 1-023
1101 East Marshall Street
P.O. Box 980568
Richmond, Virginia 23298-0568

804 828-0868
Fax: 804 827-1448
TDD: 1-800-828-1120

DATE: August 11, 2005

TO: Laura Moriarty, PhD
College of Humanities and Sciences
Box 842019

FROM: Lea Ann Hansen, PharmD
Chairperson, VCU IRB Panel D
Box 980568



RE: **VCU IRB #: 4375**
Title: Student Learning Assessment in the Social Sciences: Establishing a National Baseline for Criminal Justice

On July 28, 2005 the following **change(s)** to your research study have ***qualified for exemption*** according to 45 CFR 46.101(b) Category 1. This determination reflects the revisions received in the Office of Research Subjects Protection on June 28, 2005. This determination includes the following items reviewed by this Panel:

PROTOCOL: **Student Learning Assessment in the Social Sciences: Establishing a National Baseline for Criminal Justice** (received 6/21/05)
- Includes Criminal Justice Learning Assessment Survey (online survey) [received 07/28/05]

ADDITIONAL DOCUMENTS:
- Appendix B: Dear Dr./Mr./Ms. Invitation Letter (received 07/28/05)

This Institutional Review Board is in compliance with good clinical practices (GCP) as defined under the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) regulations and the International Conference on Harmonization (ICH) guidelines. Virginia Commonwealth University is approved by DHHS to conduct human subjects research under a Federal Wide Assurance #FWA00005287. **All correspondence related to this research study must include the IRB protocol number and the investigator's name(s) to assist us in locating your file. Please note that the CCHR number is no longer valid, if applicable.**

The Primary Reviewer assigned to your research study is Richard Gayle, EdD. If you have any questions, please contact Dr. Gayle at rgayle@vcu.edu or 828-1948; or you may contact Susan Kimbrough, IRB Coordinator, VCU Office of Research Subjects Protection, at sdkimbrough@vcu.edu or 827-1445.

Appendix C

Criminal Justice Learning Assessment Survey

As you know, many faculty and administrators in higher education are implementing assessment plans to evaluate the quality of, and ultimately improve, student learning and development. As the president of ACJS, it is my intention to portray a national representation of the status of academic assessment as it relates to measuring student learning outcomes in criminal justice. Thus, by administering an online survey, I am conducting a study to establish a national baseline that comprehensively describes student learning assessment in criminal justice programs/departments/schools within institutions of American higher education.

Please note that the survey software being used enables respondents to remain anonymous as the Internet service provider codes are blocked when the survey is submitted. Your consent is implied when you complete the online survey and submit it.

Please take the approximately 15 minutes needed to complete the questionnaire. The survey has six sections: general information, learning objectives, assessment instruments, data analysis, application of learning assessment results, and institutional environment.

Please click on the link below to begin.

http://surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=125281143762

General Information

1. Which of the following best describes your institution?

    a. Community college
    b. College or university that offers undergraduate work only
    c. College or university that offers both undergraduate and graduate work
    d. Other (please specify) _____

2. Which of the following best describes your institution?

a. Public
b. Private
c. Private with religious affiliation
d. Other (please specify) _____

3. Which of the following types of criminal justice degrees are offered by your institution? (Check all that apply.)

a. Associate's Degree (AA/AS/AAS)
b. Baccalaureate Degree (BA/BS)
c. Master's Degree (MA/MS)
d. Doctorate (Ph.D.)
e. Other (please specify) _____

4. Which of the following best describes the unit where criminal justice is located in your institution?

a. Criminal justice is a program within a school
b. Criminal justice is one of many programs within a department
c. Criminal justice is a department combined with other disciplines (e.g., sociology or political science)
d. Criminal justice is a department in and of itself
e. Criminal justice is a school in and of itself
f. Other (please specify) _____

QUESTIONS 5 AND 6 ARE COMMUNITY COLLEGES ONLY.

5. How many faculty members are in your Criminal Justice Program/Department/School?

_____ Full-time faculty
_____ Adjunct faculty

6. How many criminal justice majors are in your Criminal Justice Program/Department/School?

_____ Number of criminal justice majors

QUESTIONS 7 AND 8 ARE FOR FOUR-YEAR COLEGES AND UNIVERSITIES ONLY.

7. Which of the following best describes your Criminal Justice Program/Department/School?

a. Criminal justice offers graduate work and has over 20 full-time faculty members
b. Criminal justice offers graduate work and has 11 to 20 full-time faculty members
c. Criminal justice offers graduate work and has 10 or fewer full-time faculty members
d. Criminal justice offers only undergraduate work and has over five full-time faculty members
e. Criminal justice offers only undergraduate work and has five or fewer full-time faculty members
f. Criminal justice is combined with other disciplines
g. Other (please specify) _____

8. How many criminal justice majors are in your Criminal Justice Program/Department/School?

_____ Undergraduate
_____ Graduate

9. Which association accredits your institution?

a. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC)
b. North West Association of Schools and Colleges (NWASC)
c. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCACS)
d. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)
e. Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools (MSACS)
f. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS)
g. Not accredited

Learning Objectives

NOTE: "Learning objectives" refer to the objectives/goals of the entire criminal justice program, department, or school rather than individual courses. Please respond to the survey questions accordingly.

If your Program/Department/School does not currently assess student learning, please skip the remainder of the survey and thank you for your participation.

10. When did your Program/Department/School start to assess student learning? (Please enter "do not know" if you are unsure of the date.)

_____ Year or approximate date

If your Program/Department/School has not yet adopted a set of learning objectives, please skip the remainder of the survey and thank you for your participation.

11. At what stage is your Program/Department/School in developing learning objectives for your criminal justice majors?

a. Have not begun a discussion about learning objectives
b. Just beginning to talk about learning objectives
c. In the process of formulating learning objectives
d. Have formulated a set of learning objectives that have been adopted but have not been implemented
e. Have implemented a set of learning objectives
f. Reviewing or revising a previously adopted set of learning objectives

12. When did your Program/Department/School initially adopt a set of student learning objectives? (Please enter "do not know" if you are unsure of the date.)

_____ Year or approximate date

13. How were the student learning objectives developed? (Check all that apply.)

a. The chair working alone
b. A department subcommittee
c. The full department in regular meetings
d. A departmental retreat
e. Adopted from another source with minor modifications
f. Do not know
g. Other (please specify) _____

14. Which of the following are included in your Program/Department/School's student learning objectives? (Check all that apply.)

Students should...

a. be familiar with major theories and analytical approaches in criminal justice
b. be familiar with the major sub-fields of criminal justice

c. understand ethnic, gender, or cultural dimensions of problems and policies related to criminal justice
d. understand the international dimensions of problems and policies related to criminal justice
e. use quantitative and statistical approaches to criminal justice
f. design and conduct criminal justice research projects
g. read and understand criminal justice research
h. know general management and administrative principles applicable to criminal justice
i. acquire practical experience in areas of criminal justice
j. develop critical thinking skills
k. develop writing skills
l. develop reading skills
m. develop interpersonal communication skills
n. develop skills in making public presentations
o. develop information technology skills
p. develop a fundamental understanding of cognate disciplines like political science, sociology, psychology, or public administration
q. Other (please specify) _____

15. Approximately what percentage of your majors would you estimate are aware of the Program/Department/School's student learning objectives? (Please enter "do not know" if you are unsure of the percentage.)

_____ %

16. How do students know about your Program/Department/School's student learning objectives? (Check all that apply.)

a. Department newsletter or other mailing to all majors
b. Department website
c. Inclusion on syllabi
d. Electronic bulletin board (e.g., Blackboard)
e. Informed by advisors
f. There is no mechanism for informing students about learning objectives
g. Other (please specify) _____

Assessment Instruments

If your Program/Department/School has not yet implemented an assessment instrument, please skip the remainder of the survey and thank you for your participation.

17. At what stage is your Program/Department/School in determining which assessment instruments to use to measure how well your majors achieve departmental student learning objectives?

a. Have not had any discussions about an assessment instrument
b. Have discussed an assessment instrument but have not decided on it
c. Have decided on an assessment instrument but have not implemented it
d. Have decided on an assessment instrument and have implemented it
e. Reviewing or revising previously implemented instruments

18. When did your Program/Department/School initially adopt an assessment instrument to measure how well your majors achieve departmental student learning objectives? (Please enter "do not know" if you are unsure of the date.)

_____ Year or approximate date

19. How were the assessment instruments developed? (Check all that apply.)

a. The chair working alone
b. A department subcommittee
c. The full department in regular meetings
d. A departmental retreat
e. Adopted from another source
f. Do not know
g. Other (please specify) _____

20. For each assessment instrument you use to measure how well your majors achieve departmental learning objectives, please indicate how effective it is.

	We do not use this instrument	Very effective	Somewhat effective	Neither effective nor ineffective	Somewhat ineffective	Very ineffective
Grades in major course work						
Pre-test/Post-test						
Post-test only						
Senior Seminar						

or Capstone Course						
Internship						
Senior Research Project (with data collection and analysis)						
Portfolio						
Major Field Test						
Survey of students						
Exit Interview						
Observation by faculty members						
Rubrics						
Case study analysis						
Survey of department alumni						
Survey of employer/interns hip supervisor						

Data Analysis

21. Who is responsible for gathering and analyzing the data generated by learning assessment instruments? (Check all that apply.)

a. The chair
b. A designated faculty member
c. A departmental secretary
d. A graduate student
e. The faculty generally
f. Other (please specify) _____

22. How frequently do you gather and analyze data generated by learning assessment instruments?

a. Each semester or term
b. Once a year
c. On a multi-year cycle
d. Other (please specify) _____

23. How are the results of analyzing data generated by learning assessment instruments shared with faculty members? (Check all that apply.)

a. A formal written report
b. Presentation at faculty meetings
c. Presentation at a departmental retreat
d. Other (please specify) _____

Application of Learning Assessment Results

24. Please list the most significant changes you have made in your **criminal justice major** as a result of learning assessment. For example, how have you changed major requirements?

25. Please list the most significant changes you have made in your **course offerings** as a result of learning assessment. For example, have you added or dropped courses?

26. Please list the most significant changes in **specific courses** offered by your program/department/school. For example, paying more attention to analytical methods, greater use of information technology, more focus on primary sources, etc.

Institutional Environment

27. Has the organization that accredits your institution made learning assessment a priority in how it evaluates institutions?

a. It is a high priority.
b. It is somewhat of a high priority.
c. It is discussed but it is a low priority.
d. It is not a priority.
e. Do not know

28. Has the administration of your institution made learning assessment a priority?

a. It is a high priority.
b. It is somewhat of a high priority.
c. It is discussed but it is a low priority.
d. It is not a priority.
e. Do not know

29. Has your institution made resources (funds and/or personnel) available to assist your Program/Department/School in developing and implementing learning assessment programs?

a. Substantial resources are available.
b. Some resources are available.
c. Few resources are available.
d. No resources are available.

30. Indicate the kind of resources your institution **has made available** to assist your Program/Department/School in developing and implementing learning assessment programs. (Check all that apply.)

a. Course release time
b. Financial compensation
c. On-Campus workshops
d. Travel to off-campus workshops or conferences
e. On-campus centers on teaching and learning
f. None
g. Other (please specify) _____

Thank you for participating in this survey. The results will be used as part of my ACJS presidential address in Baltimore, MD.

We would also appreciate a copy of any assessment instruments (such as rubrics or test questions) that you use and/or assessment reports recently produced. Please email them as attachments to ljmoriar@vcu.edu or mail hard copies to:

Laura J. Moriarty, Ph.D.
Virginia Commonwealth University
Office of the Provost
P.O. Box 842527
Richmond, VA 23284-2527

Also, if you would like to participate in the drawing for an ACJS institutional membership, please click on the link below to send an email to indicate that you have completed the survey. Remember to include only your name and institution in the email. Thank you!

To email Dr. Laura Moriarty, please click here

Appendix D

First Request Emailed to Programs in Sample

Subject: Request from ACJS President Laura Moriarty

Dear Criminal Justice Professional:

I am the President of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS). For my presidential address, I will present information about the current state of student learning assessment in criminal justice programs. My hope is to establish a baseline understanding of what is happening with assessment in criminal justice programs throughout the nation.

A more detailed letter explaining the project (as well as the confidentiality of the results) is included in the actual survey that can be obtained by clicking on the link below. To encourage you to participate, we are raffling off one complementary ACJS institutional membership, which is valued at $250 and offers members the following benefits:

- Eligibility to apply for ACJS Academic Certification Review;
- Subscription to *Justice Quarterly* and *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*;
- One vote in all ACJS general elections;
- Eligibility to join ACJS sections;
- Two free ads in the ACJS Employment Bulletin;
- Listing in the ACJS Annual Program free of charge;
- One free use of the ACJS membership list per year; and
- On-line access to all current and past issues of *Justice Quarterly* and the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education.*

If you would like to participate in the drawing, please click on the link at the end of the survey to send an email to me indicating that you have completed the questionnaire. There should be nothing in the email that links you to your survey responses – only your name and institution. Your information will be included in the drawing.

Again, the results will be used as part of my ACJS presidential address as well as for a much larger study on assessment being conducted by a doctoral student at my institution. Please click on the link below and take the approximately 15 minutes needed to complete the questionnaire. Thank you.

http://surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=125281143762

Sincerely,

Laura J. Moriarty, Ph.D.
ACJS President

Appendix E

Second Request Emailed to Programs in Sample

Subject: Second Request from ACJS President Laura Moriarty

Dear Criminal Justice Professional:

I am the President of the Academy of Criminal Justice Sciences (ACJS). One month ago, I emailed you an online survey regarding student learning assessment in your criminal justice program. I will use the results of this survey as part of my presidential address at the upcoming ACJS annual meeting in the spring. It is my intention to establish a baseline understanding of what is happening with assessment in criminal justice programs throughout the nation. If you have not done so, please click on the link below and take approximately 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. **If the link to the survey does not work, please cut and paste it into the address bar of your internet service provider.**

Individuals who complete the survey are eligible to win a complimentary ACJS institutional membership, which is valued at $250 and offers members the following benefits:

- Eligibility to apply for ACJS Academic Certification Review;
- Subscription to *Justice Quarterly* and *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*;
- One vote in all ACJS general elections;
- Eligibility to join ACJS sections;
- Two free ads in the ACJS Employment Bulletin;
- Listing in the ACJS Annual Program free of charge;
- One free use of the ACJS membership list per year; and
- On-line access to all current and past issues of *Justice Quarterly* and the *Journal of Criminal Justice Education*.

If you would like to participate in the drawing, please click on the link at the end of the survey to send an email to me indicating that you have completed the questionnaire. To ensure confidentiality, there should be nothing in the email that links you to your survey responses – only your name and institution. If you have already completed the survey, thank you for your participation and interest in student learning assessment.

Please note that I am interested in assessment feedback from criminology programs as well as criminal justice programs. Therefore, if your institution has a criminology program rather than criminal justice, please complete the survey. Thank you.

http://surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=125281143762

Sincerely,

Laura J. Moriarty
ACJS President

Appendix F

Final Request Emailed to Programs in Sample

Subject: ACJS Online Survey – Final Request

Dear Program Chair:

We have contacted you twice now about completing the online Assessment Survey. This is the last attempt to get you to participate. *If you are not the person who can complete the survey, please feel free to pass the email and the link to the survey to whoever in your department can complete the survey.* For your convenience, here is the link again: http://surveymonkey.com/s.asp?u=125281143762 (If the link does not work, please insert the address into your web browser and you should be able to access the survey). *If your department/program has not yet started to conduct student learning outcomes assessment, I'd appreciate if you would just respond to this email with a statement to this effect. It can just be a "respond to sender" reply that states – No Assessment at this time.*

As you might have guessed, I am trying to distinguish between those who do not want to respond to the survey, and those who would respond but currently do not conduct student learning outcomes assessment.

I appreciate you taking the few minutes necessary to either complete the survey or to respond back that your program does not conduct student learning outcomes assessment at this time.

Thank you!

Happy Thanksgiving!

Laura

Laura J. Moriarty
ACJS President

Vita

Jennifer Jenkins was born on September 26, 1978 in Hickory, North Carolina, and is an American citizen. She graduated from Fred T. Foard High School in Newton, North Carolina in 1996. Ms. Jenkins received her Bachelor of Arts degree in Political Science from North Carolina State University in 2000. She also received her Master of Public Administration from North Carolina State University in 2002. She is a member of the Phi Alpha Alpha Honor Society and was awarded the Edward E. Willey Scholarship in 2004.

While completing her doctoral coursework requirements, Ms. Jenkins worked as a research assistant for the Virginia Center for Urban Development, the policy analysis and economic research division of Virginia Commonwealth University's Center for Public Policy. After her coursework was completed, she worked full-time as an Associate Legislative Analyst for the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission, the oversight arm of the Virginia General Assembly. Recently Ms. Jenkins was selected to receive a Graduate School Dissertation Assistantship that grants her a stipend while finishing her dissertation. Ms. Jenkins is married and resides in Charlotte, North Carolina where she will seek employment upon the completion of her degree.