Outcomes Based Assessment in Higher Education: A Content Analysis of the Statewide Policies of the Member States of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

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Outcomes Based Assessment in Higher Education: A Content Analysis of the Statewide Policies of the Member States of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools

A Dissertation Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate School of Education
In Candidacy for the Degree of Doctor of Education
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies

By

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Chicago, Illinois
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# TABLE OF CONTENTS

**LIST OF TABLES** ............................................................................................................. 4

**DEDICATION** .................................................................................................................. 5

**ABSTRACT** ....................................................................................................................... 6

**Chapter**

I. **INTRODUCTION** ........................................................................................................ 7
   - Introduction .................................................................................................................. 7
   - Purpose ....................................................................................................................... 8
   - Limitations .................................................................................................................. 13
   - Definition of Terms .................................................................................................... 14
   - Significance of the Study ............................................................................................. 16
   - Summary ..................................................................................................................... 17

II. **REVIEW OF LITERATURE** ....................................................................................... 18
   - Introduction ................................................................................................................ 18
   - The Current Assessment and Testing Practices in American Higher Education ....... 32
   - Summary ..................................................................................................................... 43

III. **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY** .................................................................................. 45
   - Introduction ................................................................................................................ 45
   - Population ................................................................................................................... 45
   - Research Design ......................................................................................................... 45
   - Data Collection .......................................................................................................... 47
   - Data Analysis .............................................................................................................. 49
   - Summary ..................................................................................................................... 52
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

(continued)

## IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

- Introduction ................................................................. 54
- Data Results ................................................................. 55
- Discussion ................................................................. 77
- Summary ................................................................. 80

## V. SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

- Summary ................................................................. 83
- Conclusions ............................................................... 84
- Recommendations ..................................................... 87

## APPENDIX

- A. Initial Cover Letter .................................................. 91
- B. Follow-Up Cover Letter ............................................ 93
- C. Cover Page ............................................................. 95
- D. Typology/Coding Chart ............................................ 97
- E. Pattern Coding Chart ............................................... 101

## REFERENCES

................................................................. 102

## VITA

................................................................. 111
LIST OF TABLES

Table 1  Policies Developed Between 1985 and 1989 .................................................... 56
Table 2  Recent Member States to Implement Assessment and Testing Policy .................. 56
Table 3  States with Policy Statements ........................................................................... 57
Table 4  States Without Policy ....................................................................................... 58
Table 5  States with a Policy Developed by the Higher Education Regulatory Board ...... 59
Table 6  Policies Developed by State Legislatures.......................................................... 60
Table 7  Composite List of Policies by Source, Origin and Name ..................................... 61
Table 8  Student Classifications Affected by State Policies ............................................. 63
Table 9  States that Allow the Individual Institution to Designate the Student Classification Affected ............................................................................................................ 64
Table 10 Student Classifications Targeted and Affected by the Policy ............................. 65
Table 11 Comparison of Policy Source of Origin with the Monitoring Source ................. 69
Table 12 Statement of Academic Areas Being Assessed .................................................. 74
DEDICATION

I am forever grateful for the loving support of my family. In particular, to the never-ending love and support of my mother (Sadie S. Collins), Aunts: Gertie S. Taylor and Cleo McManning (deceased) and my Cousin Neola Spears (deceased).

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study was to collect data on statewide outcomes assessment and testing policies of the member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The North Central Association of Colleges and Schools is the largest and most socio-politically diverse of the six higher educational regional accrediting associations. The research focused solely on the written assessment policies of each of the 19 member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. This study did not attempt to describe and/or analyze the historical evolution of each state’s policies. This research examined the policies of each state in accordance with 12 research questions. Utilizing content analytic methods, data were collected, tallied, categorized, and displayed to identify emergent themes. Individual colleges and universities assumed the responsibility for the development and implementation of assessment and testing methods and procedures. This approach allowed the various state-supported institutions to implement programs in keeping with diverse educational missions and student populations.
CHAPTER I

Introduction

The policy context for American public higher education in the 1990s is more complex than it has ever been in the history of American higher education (McGuinness, 1994). During the 1980s, a movement in higher education for greater accountability from the general public and from state government became extremely difficult to reconcile. As public concern about accountability increased, the demand for evidence of outcomes and return-on-investment also increased (McGuinness, 1994). There appeared to be four conditions that influenced the accountability movement in public higher education. First, the majority of students attending colleges and universities were enrolled at state supported institutions. Second, there existed a general dissatisfaction in society with the quality of graduates from these institutions. Third, there grew a significant increase in the competition for public funds from such areas as crime prevention and health care. Fourth, the general public held elected officials increasingly accountable for how public monies were spent (Fife, 1988).

In order to address these conditions, state governments began to mandate policies that required the use of both quantitative and qualitative indicators of performance from state supported colleges and universities (Ewell & Jones, 1994). Such information about performance was advanced as the substance of "accountability" and as a key to achieving quality (Ewell, 1990). An assumption underlying this process was that data about outcomes would reveal institutional strengths and weaknesses, and thereby point to directions for improvement (Jacobi, Austin & Ayala, 1987). States such as Florida, in 1977, and Georgia, in 1969, were among the first to establish higher education assessment policies that mandated the collection and reporting
of institutional performance relative to specific performance indicators (Astin, 1993; Ewell, 1994; Ewell & Jones, 1994; McGuinness, 1994).

A few programs, frequently cited as being well grounded and innovative, include Tennessee’s Performance Funding Program that allocates a small portion of public instructional funds to institutions on the basis of outcome criteria. Florida’s CLAST initiative includes academic skills testing of all sophomores in public universities as a condition for further advancement. Georgia’s “rising junior” testing program which is a system-wide assessment of sophomores similar to the Florida program (Ewell, 1985). This type of assessment in higher education is not new. Thirty years ago the College at the University of Chicago, the General College of the University of Minnesota and several other liberal arts colleges maintained such testing programs (Resnick, 1987). As part of these colleges’ curricula, comprehensive testing, the use of outside examiners and the administration of such instruments as the GRE to graduating seniors were used. In addition, system-wide, institutional assessment of higher education students is not new. From 1928 to 1932, the Pennsylvania General College Test Program was administered to high school pupils and college students to measure cumulative progress in growth of knowledge. This program, however, was eliminated after four years (Madaus, Stufflebean & Scriven, 1983).

Today, a commonly held belief is that state policy can lead to both accountability and institutional improvement simultaneously (McGuinness, 1994). Today’s state-level policies provide a new and clear illustration about how state government, led by state-level regulatory boards, governors, and legislators, has attempted to impose uniform standards of educational outcomes (Ewell, 1985). However, the current higher education assessment movement is different in its motives and direction than in the past. In the past, student assessment tended to be
institutional based and curriculum specific. The primary objective of these assessment processes was to serve as an additional mechanism for gauging an individual student's mastery of a particular body of knowledge in order to provide guidance (Ewell, 1985). Ewell (1985) indicates that most of the current discussions of assessment revolves around the institution or curriculum as the unit to be evaluated. The results from these assessments are used to support judgments about the effectiveness of institutions and/or curricula in meeting their stated instructional goals. Unlike assessment programs of 30 years ago, the stimulus today for their creation is often from outside the institution (Ewell, 1985).

While there is a short history of research on state mandated testing in higher education, most of the data indicates that there appears to be as many approaches as there are states (Astin, 1991). There are some reports that profile assessment programs of all 50 states, but they do not attempt to correlate or distinguish the components of these various policy statements. Still others provide profiles of individual institutional efforts but do not compare or contrast institutional policy components (Johnson, Prus, Anderson & El-Khawas, 1991). As a result, there does not appear to be any research that provides a summary of the various state testing policies that compare and contrast the components of these policy statements. This lack of data made it difficult to obtain a general understanding of what are both the most common and unique characteristics that exist among the various state policies. Without a clear comparison, the interpretation of any indicator of measurement was subject to considerable doubt (Ruppert, 1994). To compare a group of students nationally requires some understanding of the ends and means of the various assessment and testing policy characteristics among the states. The current literature on higher education testing policy is notable for what it does not say about the commonality and/or differences to be found among the various policy statements. The focus of
most of the research appears to be on the process of developing testing programs, the roles of policy, and on providing highlights regarding various individual institutional programs (Adelman, 1985; Astin, 1993; Burstein, 1985; Dunbar, 1991; Ervin, 1988; Fife, 1988; Hartie, 1985; Kalzemeyer, 1986; Korb, 1992; Paulson, 1990; Richardson, 1994; and Rodriquez, 1994).

**Purpose**

The purpose of this study was to prepare a compendium of statewide outcomes assessment and testing policies for public higher education institutions of the member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Recognition by the Association ensures that an institution has met minimum standards of educational quality that protects the public from inadequate and/or unqualified instructional curriculum; provides counsel to the institutions; and protects institutions from external and internal encroachment which might jeopardize their educational effectiveness and academic freedom (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). While the accrediting association lacks official authority for the operations of institutions, it exercises great authority in the form of its approval of institutions for accreditation, and for recommending the establishment of standards of performance, i.e., assessment programs, faculty qualifications, facilities and equipment. The approval of an institution for accreditation and the recommendation of standards of performance are determined from scheduled site audits and self-reporting.

In the last 10 years, the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools has made the development of institutional assessment programs a major standard of institutional implementation. While the association has imposed assessment standards on individual institutions, the imposition of such standards has not been attempted at the state higher education regulatory board level.
This study was concerned with the development of assessment and testing policy at the state level. The North Central Association member states were selected because of the size of the region and the sociopolitical diversity that exists among these states. Specific objectives of this study include:

1. To collect policy documents from North Central Association member states regarding statewide assessment and testing programs that exist.

2. To analyze policy documents in response to specific questions developed for this study.

3. To identify the common themes found among these documents.

The following research questions were developed to guide this study:

1. Which of the 19 member states have written policies related to higher education assessment?

2. Which states without a higher education assessment and testing policy are involved in a process of developing a policy statement?

3. What sources of approval exist for the policy?
   a. Legislative
   b. Executive Order of the Governor
   c. Higher Education Regulatory Board

4. What types of institutions were the focus of the policy?
   a. Two-year (community and junior college) only
   b. Four-year (baccalaureate degree granting) only
   c. Two-year and four-year institutions
   d. Graduate degree only institutions
e. Graduate and four-year institutions
f. Graduate, four-year and two-year institutions
g. Other

5. What are the intent and purpose of the policy?
   a. Accountability
   b. Improve undergraduate education
c. Improve student learning
d. Assess achievement and/or proficiency
e. Other

6. What agency is responsible for monitoring the policy?
   a. Legislature
   b. Governor
c. Higher Education Regulatory Board
d. Individual Institution
e. Accrediting board
f. Other

7. Who is responsible at the individual institutional level for the implementation of the policy?
   a. Institutional Assessment and Testing Office
   b. Institutional Research Office
c. Admissions Office
d. Open to institution to determine
e. Other
8. Does the policy define the period of time during which the policy will be active?

9. What sanctions are set for institutional failure to carry out provisions of the policy?

10. What areas are to be assessed/tested?
   a. Basic skills
   b. General education
   c. Graduation examination
   d. Other

11. What is the status of students to be assessed/tested under the policy?
   a. First year students
   b. Rising juniors
   c. Graduating students
   d. Graduate/professional level students
   e. Other

12. Are institutional data to be used to compare outcomes across institutions within each state?

   **Limitations**

   This study is restricted to the 19 states that comprise the membership of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. These states include: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.
This research was restricted to the written assessment and testing policies of each of the 19 states. It was assumed that these testing and assessment policies were representative of the official position and/or guidelines of each of the states. Other limitations of this study include:

1. This research did not attempt to describe and/or analyze the historical evolution of any legislative statutes, policies and/or regulations.

2. The data analyses involve descriptive compilations and comparisons within the process of discovery rather than the testing of hypotheses.

3. No attempt was made to evaluate the demand for or resistance to the state policy standards.

4. The results were limited by the accuracy of the available state statutes, policies and regulations provided to the researcher.

**Definitions of Terms**

The following definitions of terms or concepts are presented in order to provide common understanding and meaning for application throughout the body of this study.

1. **Accountability** is the process of attempting to secure performance indicators commensurate with expectations. One of the primary expectations is that benefits will be proportional to costs (Boles & Davenport, 1975).

2. **Assessment** includes the gathering of information concerning the functioning of students, staff and institutions of higher education. The information may or may not be in numerical form (Astin, 1993).

3. **Bylaws** are the rules that govern the organization and operation of a Regulatory Board (Boles & Davenport, 1975).
4. **Content analysis** is a systematic process that attempts to objectively characterize the messages in a given body of discourse in a qualitative fashion (Kryspendoff, 1980).

5. **Executive Order** is a policy, rule, regulation, procedure, or definite plan made by either an elected executive official and/or an executive level governmental agency to enforce and/or influence decisions, actions, make sanctions, and/or exercise change in the operations and affairs of a subordinate organization and/or population (Boles & Davenport, 1975).

6. **Higher education regulatory agency** is a legally appointed or elected organization that carries out the educational goals held by a group for all subgroups under its jurisdictions (Boles & Davenport, 1975).

7. **Indicator** is a component of information about a condition or result of public action that is regularly produced, reported, and systematically used for planning, monitoring or for resource allocation. Collectively, indicators asserted within a given policy are intended to be used together, not alone or out of context (Ewell & Jones, 1994).

8. **Objective** is a course of action with specific criteria for reaching a stated outcome (Boles & Davenport, 1975).

9. **Policy** is a general guide to individuals’ limits of discretion adopted by a formal group (Boles & Davenport, 1975).

10. **Rising junior** is an individual who either anticipates or has been ascribed the standing or rank of junior-level undergraduate student (Ewell, 1990).
Significance of the Study

The burgeoning higher education assessment movement has generated a large body of literature. Unfortunately, this literature mostly describes the various approaches used by individual institutions and not those of statewide systems. While this literature was valuable, it appeared to be widely dispersed in journals and varies in quality. There was no higher education assessment journal, only one newsletter, and no compendium of the various state policies that guide and direct the various individual institutional programs. The current state of research that provides useful knowledge regarding the state policies that direct and/or guide institutional programs is limited.

This study was designed to provide a compendium of 19 statewide assessment policies. This compendium identifies descriptive standards or the current elements of the various policies by which to review and evaluate them. A comprehensive comparison of the essential elements of the various policies has not been identified, and the data derived from this study will provide states with information options and greater flexibility in policy development. As changes in policy components or newer trends develop, an analysis of the characteristics of current practices is needed.

A second reason supporting this study is to provide new information to persons who affect and are affected by assessment programs. This information may be beneficial to those persons who write new policies, improve existing programs, and/or implement assessment programs.

Finally, this study expands the knowledge of assessment policy-making. It is intended that this study would constitute a useful frame of reference against a database which future assessment policies can be compared.
Summary

This study is predicated on the assumption that there is value in systematically collecting and analyzing outcomes-based testing policy statements developed by the 19 states which comprise the membership of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools Accrediting Association. There appears to be no research that provides a uniform compendium of the various state testing policies and compares the differences among them.

The next chapter explores the related literature including the history of testing and evaluation in American higher education. This literature review examines the major studies that describe the directions, expectations, and practices of the current higher education assessment movement. In Chapter III, the research method is described along with the research questions used to guide and direct the study. Chapter IV presents and discusses the findings. Chapter V presents a summary and conclusions that can be drawn from the data and makes recommendations for further investigation.
CHAPTER II

Review of the Literature

Introduction

The issue of outcome assessment and testing is not new to American higher education. From the inception of the first American college, assessment/examination/testing has played a major role in the academic process. Therefore, the current assessment and testing of students was not a fad, neither was it a momentary issue brought about by a new transitory reform movement. Furthermore, the assessment/testing of students will not fade away in the decade that follows and will remain a part of American higher education as long as the need to know something about effectiveness (Jacobi, Astin & Ayala, Jr., 1987).

This chapter was designed to provide a historical evolvement of the use of assessment/testing in American higher education. This historical chronology of assessment and testing in higher education provided an understanding of the past methods in order to address the research questions established for this study. The second part of this chapter was designed to provide information regarding major research studies conducted on the current assessment and testing movement. The purpose of this section was to set assessment and testing in the context of the array of current evidence.

History of Assessment and Testing in American Higher Education

This review of the history of assessment and testing in American higher education was not a history of educational institutions but a history of the growth of assessment and testing as it developed over three centuries.

In order to understand the evolvement of assessment and testing movement it was necessary to establish a operational historical perspective. The educational methods of
assessment and testing cannot be set off as process and procedure unto itself. This literature review attempted to examine the social context that has influenced the assessment and testing methods that were used in various periods of American higher education. The Colonial Colleges essentially had four major aims: (1) the advancement of knowledge in literature; (2) the education of individuals in the area of philosophy, language, arts, and sciences; (3) education for the service of the church and state; and (4) the propagation of religious faith. Consequently, it can be assumed that when a university established goals and objectives, then it would naturally attempt to measure its success in accomplishing them (Smallwood, 1935).

The desire of religious denominations for a literate, college-trained clergy was the most important single factor for explaining the founding of the Colonial College. Various Protestant Christian denominations were important in the founding of eight of the nine Colonial Colleges. The vast majority of faculty were clergymen and were the largest intellectual class of the time (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

During this period, the only way to prepare college training was by means of private tutoring or instruction by a local minister. To be admitted to one of the colleges, a potential was required to submit them for examination (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). These college methods of examination were modeled after practices used at Cambridge and Oxford in England (Rudolph, 1962). The Colonial College faculty principally used these methods to examine the preparedness and mental faculties of students (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

As an entrance requirement, potential students were examined by oral recitation to assess their knowledge of Greek and Latin literature and language (Rudolph, 1962). Entrance into each of the colleges demanded that some subjective opinion be reached regarding the acceptance or rejection of the person for enrollment (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).
The oral examination was primarily a face-to-face, question and answer session between student(s), teacher, tutor, and/or a committee. The advantages of this type of examination are that: (1) it increases student/faculty interaction; (2) it reduces the likelihood of students' misunderstanding of test questions; (3) it permits follow-up questions; (4) it can be used to test breadth, depth and skills; and (5) permits immediate feedback. However, it has extreme disadvantages: (1) it favors the more verbal student; (2) consumes a great deal of time; (3) difficult for students to prepare themselves; and (4) relies upon subjective evaluation (Levine, 1978).

Until 1775, degrees were obtained when students passed a public oral examination after remaining in residence at the college for a varying period of time (Rudolph, 1962). The first entrance and graduation examinations were administered by Harvard. The entrance examinations were one entire day and were intensive in their approach to the subject requirements (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Levine, 1978). Students were required to pass an oral examination and write an essay in Latin to be admitted (Levine, 1978). The delivery of public oration was the primary method of signifying commencement honors. Often, two students would be assigned a statement of universal truth to argue for the purpose of testing knowledge. The examiners were often the President, tutors (faculty), members of the governing board and interested gentlemen of liberal education. The public examination method proved not to be a success because of the thoroughness and the lack of length of time to properly measure the abilities which had been attained (Smallwood, 1935).

The Colonial College examinations reflect a system of accountability that measures student performance. This examination system was not the result of the external demand for evidence of educational competency. However, as designed, these examinations can be
considered to be institution specific in their origin and purpose, and does not include data that could be used for comparison. Rather than an evaluation of the data, these examination events informed the public that these events, in fact, occurred.

At the close of the 18th century, new subjects were added to the curriculum of a number of colleges. In 1745, knowledge of arithmetic was made a requirement for college entrance at Yale; in 1765, the College of Philadelphia established the first chair in medicine, and in 1779 William and Mary established the first chair in law and allowed a small amount of curriculum election (Levine, 1978).

These curriculum additions reflect significant changes from the origin Latin, Greek, philosophy and religion. The curriculum of the 19th century had become more diverse in its size and scope (Levine, 1978). This era saw the rapid increase and interest in the natural sciences and mathematics that served to help make teaching more specialized than in the colonial period. These new subjects changed the emphasis on deductive to inductive thought and reasoning. In many instances, lectures were used to replace the exclusive use of written materials to disseminate information to students. As the curriculum expanded and changed during this period, there was little agreement as to what comprised a college education (Smallwood, 1935).

The first half of the 19th century was a period of educational reform. A Harvard professor, George Ticknor, criticized the American college for the poor quality of its libraries, the exclusion of modern languages from the curriculum, and the lack of specialized departments. This criticism was based upon his educational experience in Germany. However, the most significant criticism of the American college was the Yale report of 1828. The report indicated the purpose of college is to provide “discipline and furniture of the mind.” The Yale faculty set forth an
argument to keep the classical curriculum as it was (Rudolph, 1962). The report reaffirmed the Yale classical curriculum and against technical and partial courses of study (Levine, 1978).

Irrespective of this report, Yale continued to make innovations in the area of examination/assessment. It was during the early portion of the 19th century, 1804-05, Yale initiated daily quizzes. In 1830, Yale changed its annual oral examination to become a biennial written examination (Levine, 1978). Written examinations were conducted at the end of the sophomore and senior years. The primary difference between the new written examinations method from the oral method was that it asked the same questions of the entire class and provided a comparative evaluation of each student in the class (Smallwood, 1935).

The written test asked questions of students that are answered with a descriptive, analytic or interpretive response. The advantages of this type of test are the assessment of the depth of knowledge, permits the student to be creative, and it tests higher-order skills of writing and the ability to analyze, synthesize, apply, and organize knowledge (Levine, 1978).

This period also witnessed the use of the research paper to assess quantitative proficiencies. In-course examinations were used to assess proficiency in the use of laboratory equipment in the conducting of scientific experiments (Levine, 1978). The written examination method did not entirely displace the oral examination method (Smallwood, 1935).

Smallwood (1935) indicated that before 1800, the three oldest universities showed more interest and enacted more policies concerning the examination requirements for degree than in regard to any other phase of academic development. This was found not to be surprising because the conferring of degrees was the outward recognition of the supposed attainment of all the purposes for which the colleges were striving. The first record of an attempt to justify examination procedures can be found in a report from President Everett of Harvard. He
discussed the time spent in the classroom in recitation and instruction as well as the frequency of examinations and their relative importance (Everett, 1848). "The character in point of efficient scholarship of every university depends upon the strictness and thoroughness of these examinations, and upon the faithfulness with which the appropriate honor is granted or denied" (Quincy, 1841).

Once again we see the examination innovations were the result of individual colleges responding to curriculum changes. Other colleges appear to adopt examination methods in a response to their own needs. There appeared to be no external agencies that are imposing curricula or examinations upon individual or groups of colleges. Colleges appear to be considered with their reputation for quality (Levine, 1978).

Veysey (1965) describes the decades after the Civil War was a time of academic reform. The Civil War had served as a catalyst for the academic recognition of the respectability and social indispensability of engineering the natural sciences, and industrial technology as new career/academic areas (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). People of this ideology recommended the inclusion of these practical areas in the curriculum and favored the elective system of study as the means of achieving this goal (Veysey, 1965). One of the objectives of this ideology was to connect college study with skilled professions and vocations (Veysey, 1978). However, the results of this reform movement was not successful. One essential reason was that the larger amount of colleges during this period remained under the control of people who believed in the classical curriculum (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

Another period of higher education reform during the mid-1870s began with the partial acceptance of the German ideal to provide empirical research knowledge and community service (Veysey, 1965). As a result of this new emphasis, several colleges constructed and created
scientific laboratories and research libraries. New techniques of assessment were developed to address these new educational areas. To assess quantitative proficiencies, the research paper was used. In-course examinations were given to assess proficiency in the use of laboratory equipment and in the conducting of scientific experiments (Levine, 1978).

The 1890s saw the college curriculum expand and diversify to the point of causing an academic reform. High school students found it to be difficult to make the transition from the secondary school to college. A movement developed to establish uniform standards for high school graduation and college entry. The College Entrance Examination Board was established to organize a common examination system for college admission. The board assured colleges that the new standards would allow them to continue to admit whomever they chose, regardless of the test scores (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). In 1901, the College Entrance Examination Board of the middle states and Maryland administered the first examination.

The 20th century saw colleges make a major shift of emphasis from the maintenance of thoughts and ideas to an emphasis on the development of new knowledge. American society had focused its interest on pure science to develop new knowledge, products and materials. The new industrial emphasis required standard measurement to produce parts and products (Button & Provenzo, 1983).

The free elective, general education, concentration in a major field of study, extension and correspondence courses were operational in colleges. In essence, the undergraduate curriculum of the early 20th century was very similar to the current curriculum of colleges (Levine, 1978). This period saw the introduction of the standardized test. This new testing method utilized explicit standard instructions for administration and scoring. It was used to measure achievement.
This method of testing provided empirical evidence rather than depending upon varying subjective definition of standards (Levine, 1978).

The 1920s saw college enrollment grow to 8% of the 18 to 21 year-old population. Curricula innovations were introduced: cooperative education at Antioch College (1921); the honors program at Swarthmore College (1921); and the experimental college at the University of Wisconsin (1927). In the area of assessment and testing, the standardized entrance test continued to gain acceptance. The college board introduced the Essay Achievement Test as a tool for use in admissions. Most significantly, the college board, in 1926, introduced the multiple-choice test. These multiple choice tests were primarily achievement examinations based on the curriculum of the elite preparatory schools. These institutions that used the new multiple choice entrance test were not required to report examination data to any person or external organization (Levine, 1978). As a result of not being required to report entrance examination data, institutions were not accountable to the general public or any public agencies.

The 1930s were known as the decade of the great economic depression. Private colleges suffered reductions in their endowments and tuition income. Likewise, public institutions had a reduction in appropriated funds and student tuition. Student enrollment declined by more than 8% (Veysey, 1965).

This decade saw the development of the concept of summative evaluation as a method to assess student progress relative to educational objectives. The accomplishment of educational objectives became the goal rather than using tests as the sole evaluation tool. In the assessment of whether or not the objectives had been met, often used testing as a strategy to measure student progress. A method evaluation attempts to provide insight through description (Tyler & Smith, 1942). Two significant reports are representative of this new method. The Study of Schools and
Colleges in Pennsylvania and the Study of the Relations of Schools and Colleges (the eight-year study) (Britell, 1980).

The Pennsylvania Study criticized the idea of measuring what students know upon entering college and suggested that more emphasis be placed on the attainment of knowledge as a means for recognizing cumulative progress. The first administration of these achievement tests was performed in 1928, the second in 1930, and the third in 1932. This examination program was able to cover a wide variety of information using objective tests. The final report indicated that the typical college student gained in general knowledge during their last two years of college (Pace, 1979).

The Study of the Relations of Schools and Colleges (the eight-year study) was a comparison of intended learning outcomes with actual learning outcomes. This study concentrated on learning outcomes rather than institutional and teaching inputs; thereby avoiding the subjectivity of professional educators. The measurement of outcomes included tests but also a much wider range of variables than those associated with standardized norm-reference tests (Madaus, Stufflebeam & Sciven, 1983).

The 1930s was a period of restoration of the senior level comprehensive examination. Hutchings and Marchese (1990) report in a 1935 survey that 242 Colleges required a senior level comprehensive examination. This number reflected an increase from 71 institutions in 1925 but the number was restricted to students with majors.

The 1940s are characterized by the image of World War II. The war required colleges and universities to become directly involved in the development of war material and the training of personnel. Colleges and universities received large financial contracts for participating in these efforts. These contracts were in four areas of service: college instruction in specialized areas;
military instruction of officer candidates; training in such areas as aviation, and scientific research (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976).

To assist in the selection of both high school and college candidates, the United States Armed Forces Institute (USAFI) developed and implemented the test of General Education Development. In addition, the military used a standard of competence in which to classify each military task. This military process established external competency criteria to select and place college graduates in the military (Britell, 1980).

At the conclusion of World War II, the returning veteran created the most rapid growth in colleges and universities enrollment in the history of American higher education. There were two significant educational assistance acts passed by the U.S. Congress Public Law 346 (the G.I. Bill) and Public Law 16 (the Vocational Educational Rehabilitation Program for veterans with service connected disabilities). The passage of these two bills helped to increase the diversity of the socio-economics of postsecondary enrollment.

The 1940s also witnessed the Graduate Records Office of the Carnegie Foundation. General education and graduate records examination tests were developed which covered general mathematics, physical sciences, biological sciences, social studies, literature, arts, effectiveness of expression and vocabulary. The Cooperative Test Service or General Culture tests covered current social problems, history and social studies, literature, science, fine arts, and mathematics. Both of these tests were developed as outcome assessment for college seniors (Pace, 1979).

The most significant evaluation study of the 1940s was the Cooperative Study in General Education. This study was sponsored by the American Council on Education and conducted by Ralph Tyler. The goal of the study was to improve the general education programs in 24 institutions of higher education. The study was designed to address 10 questions. One of the
questions was, "How should achievement be appraised and recorded?" To this end, the study developed numerous instruments that were useful in assessing growth in general education (Tyler, 1947).

For the most part, the 1950s witnessed the traditional view of teaching and testing being challenged by a new cognitive view of behavior and learning. This new cognitive view of learning, validated the teaching of skills through repetitive drill and practice, and the teaching of knowledge through rote memorization. The general argument against this method was that students soon forgot the answers they had memorized because the teaching process disregarded reasoning, analysis, problem solving, and other higher order skills. What was sought was a paradigm shift and how people learned and were tested. There was recognition that American education was changing in the following manner: (1) the 1940s had contributed to a change from a system of selection to a system that was expected to educate everyone; (2) modern society required a higher level of skill than previous periods; and (3) most current educational tests had serious limitation. They believed that tests should provide more than a score, a label or percentile rank. Tests should be designed to find out whether students understood what they have learned and enabled them to demonstrate proficiency (Ravitch, 1995).

The 1950s saw another Cooperative Study of General Education sponsored by the American Council on Education and funded by the Carnegie Commission. The study had six committees to accomplish the six objectives of the study. Resulting from this study were new tests of critical thinking and analysis in the following areas: social science, reading and writing, science, humanities, and a general analysis of critical thinking and attitudes (Dressel & Mayhew, 1954).
Pace (1979) suggested that a new era of achievement tests began in 1954 with the introduction of the area tests of the Graduate Record Examination. This test evaluated the student's ability to read, understand and interpret knowledge. This test did not measure specific subject matter of courses, but was much more oriented towards general knowledge. The testing of the understanding and interpretation of information was considered to be more important and lasting outcome of a college education.

In 1958, the United States Congress passed the National Defense Education Act. This act served to expand educational opportunities for students in the sciences, mathematics and foreign languages. This act provided loans for undergraduates, graduate fellowships, and international aid for teacher education.

The decade of the 1960s was a period of higher education commitment to expand educational opportunities for racial and ethnic minorities in order to remedy previous acts of segregation and discrimination. The courts and civil rights organizations questioned the use of certain assessment tools as being appropriate for measuring competence. Despite the social issues of the 1950s and 1960s, public accountability demanded evidence of educational achievement. The central debate became whether the goals of opportunity were more important than meritocracy. Assessment for competence and performance remained the individual issue for each higher education institutions. During this period of history, most of the American colleges and universities continued surveying the assessment practices developed in the past (Britell, 1980).

By the late 1960s, assessment became a social indicator to be used in judging the educational system, rather than as a measure of student knowledge or learning. However, reports indicated a steady national decline of SAT and ACT scores which began to raise questions about the credibility of the educational system. At this stage, the primary concentration of criticism was
placed on the public high schools. Leaders complained that they saw few employable public school graduates. Newspapers carried accounts of high school students who were barely literate, and the courts were presented with education “malpractice” suits by plaintiffs who claimed not to have received an education despite 12 years in the public schools. The prevailing public opinion was that students were not learning. The central issues of education shifted from who schools taught to what schools tested. Education, standard setting, and testing became synonymous (Baratz, 1980).

The federal government continued to develop programs to expand opportunities to all citizens. The Upward Bound Program was developed in 1965 to prepare students with academic potential for college; the Higher Education Act of 1965 provided funds to private and public colleges for research, educational facilities and improvement of undergraduate education; and student aid programs that included guaranteed student loans, educational opportunity grants, work study, and fellowships (Levine, 1978).

Congress required the grant recipients to perform evaluations of their projects. Students who participated in these grant projects were tested for achievement using commercially standardized tests to measure student gains between outcomes and project objectives (Britell, 1980). Testing methods continued to advance in the development of the credit by examination to test subject proficiency at the college level and for academic credit. This test was developed for adults returning to college after a period of absence (Levine, 1978).

The 1970s saw many states develop policy that mandates public schools to initiate assessment and testing programs. These mandated programs generally set minimum competency standards for elementary and secondary level students. Schools were required to be accountable
to the tax paying public by mandating students to achieve a prescribed competency level on commercially standardized tests (Britell, 1980).

The 1970s were a period of higher education reform. The professionalization of teaching spurred the use of assessment techniques. The Holmes Group and the Carnegie Forum issued reports calling for the creation of a national board to develop standards and procedures for entering the profession (Sims, 1992). Towards the end of the decade, teacher certification examination and other licensing and certifications examinations were adopted by numerous professional areas. These examinations were primarily criterion reference testing to obtain information regarding where the examinees stood in relation to performance standards and not on the basis of individual standing to a norm group. The computer became a technological tool in the area of testing. It was used to develop, store, retrieve, and analyze tests (Plake & Melican, 1987).

In 1978, the Virginia Board of Education mandated that high school students were required to achieve a minimum proficiency in reading, writing, speaking, computational skills, and U.S. history and culture in order to graduate (Levine, 1978). This decade witnessed Alexander Astin launching the debate against the traditional thinking of what higher education considered to be quality. He argued that the idea of quality was considered to be a function of resources such as high student SAT scores, the number of faculty holding a Ph.D., fiscal endowment, library holdings, and a function of process such as a rich curriculum and good academic advising. These functions were considered to tell little, and were misleading as a real measure of a college quality and contribution to student learning. Outcomes and attainment evidence was proposed as a necessity (Astin, 1991). Combined with other ideas, this discussion became one of the principal issues of the higher education reform movement of the 1980s.
In summary, assessment and testing has been a part of American higher education from the inception. The methods of higher education have advanced from oral to written to multiple choice and now to the computer. Historically, American colleges and universities operated under the concepts of autonomy, the rights and authority to govern itself, and to demonstrate accountability for its performance in their own manner.

The major changes to this operating concept of assessment and testing were the Study of Schools and Colleges in Pennsylvania; and the Study of the Relations of Schools and Colleges (the eight-year study). The concept of evaluation evolved from the Pennsylvania to include student assessment and testing using objective tests to help determine the achievement of overall program objectives. The current assessment and testing movement is a result of a call for curricular renewal and quality, political accountability, elementary and secondary education reform, and the changing of technology in the work force.

The Current Assessment and Testing Movement

Historically, American colleges and universities have been immune to the pressures of governmental intervention. Academic autonomy and operational diversity have been highly prized and protected tenants. Today, external sources seek accountability for funds, assurance of educational performance and indicate a shift of emphasis from the quality of inputs to the quality of outputs (Sims, 1992).

During this decade, both government and the private sector had a growing emphasis on increased efficiency and cost effectiveness. This emphasis was transferred to higher education as it increased in size and complexity, which resulted in the need for more money to support its functions (Sims, 1992). Legislators and governors became sensitive to the fact that they knew very little about the impact of the state's investment in higher education. What was known was
higher education could consume from a quarter to a third of a state’s budget each year. Like business and industry, higher education underwent a new type of scrutiny regarding the return on the taxpayer investment (Ewell, 1990).

During this period, professional accrediting organizations began to focus on outcomes assessment as a stipulation for licensure. The accrediting agencies required licensing examinations for entry into the profession. If a student could not pass the licensing examination after completing a degree program, they were not allowed to work in the profession. The issue of outcome assessment is a recent consideration of the regional accrediting agencies (Sims, 1992).

In 1981, the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools conducted a three-year study to renew and evaluate its entire accreditation process and standards. The study included an extensive survey of colleges and universities within the region. The study concluded that emphasis should continue to be placed on inputs and educational process; however, new emphasis should be placed on outcomes (Commission of Colleges, 1981).

In 1984 and 1986, Patricia Thrash, Director of the Commission of Institutions of Higher Education of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, conducted a survey of regional and national and specialized accrediting agencies to determine the extent of emphasis on outcome assessment. The following are the findings:

- Outcomes measurement or evaluation of institution and program effectiveness is an integral part of accrediting agency evaluations, as expressed in their criteria, documents, self-study institutes, and evaluator training programs.
- Accrediting commissions offer a mixed response to whether there is or ought to be a relationship between outcomes measurement and public accountability, and whether outcomes and accountability should be viewed as related to educational quality.
Accrediting commission officials express caution about overly narrow definitions of outcomes and the misuse of instruments to measure competence; they support outcomes as one important aspect of documenting institutional effectiveness, but stress the interrelatedness of outcomes and other criteria that must be applied in making an accrediting judgment, such as purpose, resources, organization, programs, and promise of continuing effectiveness (Thrash, 1988, p. 17).

In 1988, William Bennett, Secretary of Education, amended the Secretary’s Criteria for Recognition of Accrediting Agencies. The amendment was published in the Federal Register and urged accrediting agencies to inquire about postsecondary assessment results. This amendment ultimately gave the secretary the power to determine which agencies will be recognized by the federal government and the ability of institutions accredited by the respective agencies to receive federal funding (Sims, 1992).

Perhaps the greatest call for outcome assessment came a wave of critical reports, student scores on ability and achievement tests. The following major reports were extremely significant to the assessment movement in higher education. Access to Quality Undergraduate Education (Southern Regional Education Board, 1985); Involvement in Learning (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education, 1984); Integrity in the College Curriculum (Association of American College, 1985); To Reclaim a Legacy (Bennett, 1984); and Four Critical Years (Astin, 1977).

Access to Quality Undergraduate Education (Southern Regional Education Board, 1985) called for the need to identify and address the growing basic skill deficiencies among incoming freshmen rather than exclusionary admissions testing. The most comprehensive of these reports was Involvement in Learning (Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher
Education, 1984). It had three major themes: high standards, active student involvement in the learning process, and explicit feedback on performance. Astin (1985) stated that individual student learning can be significantly enhanced through frequent communications about performance. The second recommendation indicated that institutions can also learn through information about outcomes and can make continuous improvement in response (Ewell, 1984).

In two similar reports, Integrity in the College Curriculum (Association of American Colleges, 1985) and To Reclaim a Legacy (Bennett, 1984), the focus was on curricular content and structure. However, these reports indicated the need for intensive-integrative demonstration of student knowledge and capacities to complete and certify undergraduate instruction (Ewell, 1984). Alexander Astin (1977), in Four Critical Years, analyzed data from the largest nationwide study of student development ever performed. Data for the study were collected for 10 years by the Cooperative Institutional Research Program (CIRP) of the American Council on Education. Data were obtained from 200,000 students and 300 institutions. Over 80 outcomes were assessed including attitudes, values, aspirations, persistence and achievement. In his conclusions, Astin made several recommendations for policy and practice, such as finding ways to get students more involved, finding ways to minimize the number of low grades by moving from a normative grading system to a criterion reference system, and recommendations to reduce attrition.

One of the common themes of these reports was that higher education needed to strengthen and improve its assessment practices. The problem has historically been that the assessment of student learning and development has been a completely private affair between the student, the faculty and the institution. Legislators and state policy-makers are aware of this history and are now requiring better evidence of what is actually happening in the teaching and learning process. Today, many educators and politicians are using educational testing as a
indicator to be used in judging educational systems rather than as a measurement of the student tests (Baratz, 1980).

One of the major barriers to understanding the current assessment movement is the variation that exists in policies among the states. Alexander Astin (1991) stated that there seems to be almost as many state approaches to higher education assessment as there are states. These approaches were the result of policy, but there appeared to be very little research studies that have systematically examined, compared and contrasted the various elements of these policy statements.

The shifting of public policy helped to spawn a series of national reform reports that highlighted the use of assessment as a tool of reform and accountability. These reports maintain that information on college students' performance should be made public, used to inform policy and resource allocation decisions, and inform consumer choice in the decision of college selection (Ewell, 1991). The following are some of the major studies that have helped to establish the aforementioned directions, expectations and practices within the current higher education assessment movement: *Time for Reform of Education* (National Governors' Association, 1991); *Report on Education: Results in Education* (National Governor's Association, 1987); *Effectiveness in Undergraduate Education: An Analysis of State Quality Indicators* (Richardson, 1994); *Performance Indicators for Higher Education: Policy Themes and Variations* (Ewell, 1994); *The Effect of State Policy on Undergraduate Education: State Policy and College Learning* (Jones & Ewell, 1993); *The Federal Role in Encouraging State by State Achievement Comparisons* (Katzemeyer, 1986); *On the Development of National Assessment of College Student Learning: Measurement Policy and Practice in Perspective* (Dunbar, 1991); *Assessment in American Higher Education: Issues and Contexts* (Adelman, 1985); *Postsecondary Student
Outcomes: A Feasibility Study (Korb, 1992); State Postsecondary Education Structures: Handbook of State Coordinating and Governing Boards (McGuinness, Aims, Epper & Farredondo, 1994); and Levers for Change: The Role of State Government in Improving the Quality of Postsecondary Education (Ewell, 1985).

Developments in statewide testing policies and programs that are consistent with the current assessment and testing reform movement have continued to generate activities. Eight research studies have been identified for their relevance to the current study and will be reviewed in the section that follows. These studies have titles that are comparable to this study; however, they are different in methodologies.

Assessment and Outcomes Measurement: A View from the States (Boyer, Ewell, Finney & Mingle, 1987) was a report of a statewide or system-wide survey of assessment and outcomes measurements in the 50 states. This survey afforded state boards an opportunity to describe in detail what they were doing in the name of assessment. This report revealed a few new initiatives of mandated statewide testing. However, the majority of the state approaches had the following themes:

a. assessment emphasizes the responsibilities of individual institutions for developing local assessment plans;

b. a number of states has initiated, planned or has already in place processes to monitor other outcomes such as student retention, satisfaction, and placement of graduates in jobs; and

c. economic and opportunity development.

While this report provided a profile of the assessment programs of the 50 states, it did not attempt to correlate or distinguish any of the components of the various state assessment policies.
It provides few, if any, generalizations regarding common policy concepts. Any inferences drawn from these profiles must be primarily developed by the reader. As a result, Boyer's study is significantly different from the current study of this researcher. The current research study identifies common themes, constructs, and implicit or explicit relationships, and then maps out the underlying framework of these elements.

The report, *State Initiatives in Assessment and Outcomes Measurement: Tools for Teaching and Learning in the 1990s* (Paulson, 1990) is the result of a survey of all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and Puerto Rico regarding their approaches to assessment and outcomes management. A profile of each state is provided and is based on responses to a questionnaire. The survey targeted the following areas of concern: origin of the initiative, description of the initiative, primary purpose, common data or test results collected across the state, a descriptive indication of whether reporting or approval is required of assessment initiatives, and how initiatives are funded. The intent of this report was to provide specific information about each state's assessment initiative to serve those who are most closely associated with the issue.

This report is a descriptive profile and not a comparative study. It is intended to provide a description of the various programs and not to make any comparison among the elements of the programs. This research study will give specific attention to similarities and differences to provide breadth and depth of understanding through the use of clearly formulated questions for investigation.

*Assessing Assessment: An In-Depth Status Report on Higher Education Assessment Movement in the 1990s* (Johnson, Prus, Anderson & El-Khawas, 1991) surveyed a stratified sample of 455 individual colleges and universities that were representative of over 2,600 two- and four-year post-secondary institutions in the United States. Prior to this report information was
not available that provided an integrated picture of assessment efforts across models, institutions and topics. This study was designed to provide information regarding the inner workings of individual institution’s assessment programs. The special focus of this study was on “comprehensive” student assessment programs, and how they are progressing toward the goals most higher education experts and mandates are advocating. The survey process allowed individual institutions with such programs to identify themselves by indicating the elements of their assessment programs.

The Johnson et al. (1991) research study differs significantly from this research in the following manner:

1. Johnson’s research focused on individual college and university programs, and not on state-level mandated policy provisions.

2. It provides an individual college or university interpretation of how each is progressing toward the goals most higher education experts and mandates are advocating, rather than a study of the mandated requirements of the various state policies.

3. The Johnson et al. (1991) study is a quantitative research project. The current study is a qualitative study which focuses on comparing contrasting messages found in each mandated policy.

State Level Education Reform: Collaborative Roles for Postsecondary Education (Rodriquez, 1994) is the results of a 1993-94 survey of the 50 states and the District of Columbia state higher education coordinating and governing boards to determine the extent to which they are involved in education reform in their states, and if involved, the issues they were addressing.
The report indicated over 50% of the states were involved in joint discussions about changes in postsecondary education admissions standards.

The survey provided evidence of state higher education boards assuming joint leadership with other state education agencies on task forces and intersegmental commissions. Since 1991, over 40 state-level collaborative commissions have been formed to address education reform.

In a review of each of the reform issues indicated by each state, none of the 50 states specifically mentioned assessment or testing policy. Several states indicated the need for performance outcome identification, admissions standards and competence standards but none of them discussed the methods which these components will be assessed.

Acting Out State-Mandated Assessment was a study conducted by Peter T. Ewell and Carol Boyer (1988) for Change Magazine. The authors investigated the effects of state-mandated assessment programs. The target of this investigation was only five states (Colorado, Missouri, New Jersey, South Dakota and Virginia). The researchers spend a week in each state interviewing the governors, legislators and their staff; state higher education executive and academic officers; and a cross-section of representatives from public colleges and universities. These interviews focused on information to help determine what state lawmakers really wanted to accomplish and what institutions were actually doing in response.

Most significant in this research is the discussion regarding “the search for models.” Statewide testing programs are discussed as a implementation model for outcome measurement. Also discussed is the issue of “The press to test” wherein which the authors found a disproportionate amount of energies devoted to standardized testing. Ewell and Boyer (1988) also indicated that each state policy differs in content, although a systematic analysis of these policy elements is not provided, neither are a sizable number of states analyzed.
Campus Trends (El-Khawas, 1987) revealed regarding changes in campus policies and practices. The major focus of the study was on the issue of assessing student learning. Others considered were focused on changes in faculty hiring and areas of curricular review, enrollment, and financial circumstances of colleges and universities. The results of the study indicated that most administrators support the use of assessment, and many campuses have discussed possible assessment approaches. Ninety-five percent of administrators supported the belief that assessment is closely tied to instructional improvement efforts. Seven in ten administrators believed that assessment should be linked to institutional planning and budgeting.

Administrators who responded to several statements about assessment offer additional perspectives on the “campus” view regarding development of assessment procedures.

- Seventy-two percent agreed that “most campus officials have strong fears about misuse of effectiveness measures by external agencies.” A year ago, 66% of campus trends respondents had agreed with this statement.
- Only about four in ten believed that colleges should publish evidence of their institutional effectiveness.
- Only 45% agreed that “states should require colleges to show evidence of institutional effectiveness.”
- Half feared that the use of standardized tests risk distorting the educational process. This is an increase over a year ago, when 38% agreed with this statement (El-Khawas, 1987, p. 5).

All of these responses reflected substantial campus opposition to external influences that might reorient programs and priorities. Administrators at private institutions expressed these concerns more often than their public-sector counterparts.
These studies provide a philosophical indication of the possible initiatives that states should pursue in the achievement of accountability. Five individual college or university assessment programs were briefly discussed. However, this report is a survey and not a focused analysis of policy statements and neither is there a comparison contrasting them.

The National Assessment of College Student Learning: An Inventory of State-Level Assessment Activities Workshop (1996) are the published results from a workshop conducted by the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems for the National Center for Education Statistics. The workshop focused on state assessment activities. The proceedings were compiled by Peter Ewell from the National Center for Higher Education Management System, and the Coordinator was Sal Corrallo, Director for the National Assessment of College Student Learning. The workshop activities were designed to address the degree to which state-level assessment initiatives in higher education might aid in the construction of a national indicator of postsecondary attainment consistent with Goal 6.5 of the National Education Goals, and to determine ways in which the National Center for Education Statistics and the states might work more effectively to develop mutually-supporting activities and policies in the realm of postsecondary assessment. The design of the workshop agenda was intended to address the following four questions:

- What specific areas of knowledge, skills, and attributes are being assessed at the state level, and what is their commonality both across states and with the skills identified in Goal 6.5?

- How are these outcomes being assessed, with what frequency are they being reported, and how are the results being used?
• What might be done to help states broaden and enhance their assessment efforts in ways that would benefit both the states and meet the need for national reporting?

• What is the appropriate role of NCES in assisting states and institutions to gather and report better information about postsecondary results?

Each state was requested to inventory their assessment activities. Five common categories were defined: the name of the policy, the date the policy was established, type of initiative, common instruments and public reporting. The information provided by the state background papers indicated the current state programs vary considerably in their approach and policies, and state assessment programs as a body do not provide a common foundation for meaningful national reporting.

The workshop data is a report and analysis of participant reports. The workshop design allowed the participants to vary in the reported components of these individual reports. This research study does not allow for this type of variance in data because it is a direct content analysis of 19 policies in response to research questions.

The literature related to the research design and process of this study is limited. However, these studies do provide information and direction. This literature, together with the research design of this study, will guide this process of discovery.

Summary

The history of testing/assessment and evaluation in American higher education is traced from the colonial period to the current reform movement of accountability. The literature provides a description of how modestly testing began as a series of individual institutional experiments to help build public confidence. The review also traces the development and implementation of formal evaluation processes with a concentration on the use of tests that help
assess performance outcomes. As a result, this history sorts out some of the complexities of the most commonly applied assessment approaches program and a inventory of state assessment activities. These reports cannot be correlated with the research question proposed for this study.

The next chapter will describe the research methodology and design. Chapter IV will describe and interpret the findings while Chapter V will provide a summary, conclusions and recommendations.
CHAPTER III

Research Methodology

Introduction

This chapter is designed to describe the qualitative methods used to provide a description of the assessment and testing policies of the member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. It provides a detailed description of the research design, data collection procedures, data analysis process, trustworthiness, and a chapter summary.

Population

The population utilized in this research study consists of the 19 member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. This population was selected under the assumption that the states that comprise this regional association have the greatest potential of variance than any of the other five regional accrediting associations. These member states vary among themselves in their ethnic make-up, geo-political location, socioeconomic environment, and higher educational mission and goals.

The following 19 states comprise this regional accrediting association: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

Research Design

A qualitative research design was selected to address the research questions described in Chapter I of this study. The qualitative method known as "content analysis" was determined to be the best way to discover and understand the contents of a policy statement. As a methodology, qualitative procedures do not attempt to manipulate any pre-determined variables.
This approach does not begin with a theory but allows theory to emerge from the discovery of data. In this study, the task of this researcher was to find patterns from words, sentences and/or paragraphs that answer specific research questions.

The following is a listing of other advantages of using content analysis:

1. It is an unobtrusive technique that can be used in the study of text that already exists rather than surveying and/or interviewing people to produce the text.

2. It is designed to facilitate the discovery of patterns and themes found in the text.

3. The discovered patterns and themes found in the text can be related to specific research questions.

4. It is an objective system of analysis that uses explicit rules that enable other researchers to replicate the process.

5. It allows the researcher to include or exclude characteristics according to consistently applied criteria and thereby reducing the potential for error (Singer, 1964, p. 250).

The research of Miles and Huberman (1984); Budd, Thorp and Donohew (1967); Fielding and Fielding (1986); and Maykut and Morehouse (1994) provide descriptions and examples of content analysis procedures that include: data collection, data reduction, data display, and procedures for developing conclusions. The methods of Krippendorf (1980) are helpful in analyzing, exploring, and discovering patterns and relationships.

While there are no doctoral dissertations that this study could replicate, four dissertations did provide assistance with the application of qualitative methods to the higher education setting and in the assessment of policies. McMurray (1975) conducted a content analysis of the governing board policy statements of the university systems in the “Big Eight” Conference.
Gomez (1990) prepared a descriptive Analysis of Hispanic Migrant Parents’ Perceptions of American Schools and the parents’ role in their childrens’ education. McLaughlin (1997) prepared an examination of the content and use of development policies to establish endowed chairs at Research I and II universities. Haldemann (1997) analyzed public research university student conduct codes to determine the types of expressional activity that these universities believed were not protected by First Amendment guarantees.

**Data Collection**

To obtain state-level assessment and testing policies from the 19 member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, multiple contacts were made. First, telephone contact was made with the staff of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools and their assistance was requested in obtaining documents from member states regarding higher education outcomes-based testing. A staff officer in the area of assessment informed me that the Association did not maintain copies of these policy documents from its member states. A suggestion was made to contact the Education Commission of the States regarding these documents.

Telephone contact was made with the staff of the Education Commission of the States and assistance was requested in locating the required documents. A staff officer in the area of assessment indicated that the agency did not possess such documents and that the researcher should contact Educational Testing Service (ETS), and the American College Testing (ACT). Each of the aforementioned agencies was contacted for assistance in search of the necessary documents. However, none of the agencies was found to possess the necessary documents.

The National Center for Educational Statistics was also contacted regarding a report from a hearing conducted for the agency by Dr. Peter Ewell, National Center for Higher Education
Management Systems (NCHEMS). The report was entitled, “National Assessment of College Student Learning: An Inventory of State-Level Assessment Activities” (1996). Dr. Ewell was contacted for assistance in obtaining a copy of this report that contained a roster of the names and addresses of persons who filed a report with NCES to compile the 1996 inventory of state-level assessment activities. However, this roster did not include information from the following states: Arizona, Michigan, Ohio, and Wyoming.

Higher education regulatory boards in each of the states omitted, Arizona, Michigan, Ohio, and Wyoming, were telephoned to obtain the name and address of the appropriate person to contact regarding this matter.

In order to obtain copies of the written assessment and testing policies, a letter was mailed to each contact person for each of the 19 state higher education regulatory boards. The letter (see Appendix A) described the purpose of the research study and solicited assistance and cooperation in providing the necessary materials. Each letter contained a self-addressed envelope in which to mail any relevant documents to the researcher. Ten days after mailing the initial letter, a follow-up letter which restated the importance and need for assistance in this study was mailed to nonrespondents. This letter (see Appendix B) also included a self-addressed envelope for mailing a copy of the documents. Ten days after the second letter was sent, a direct telephone call was made to agencies to request the necessary documents.

As each policy statement was received, the name of the state, the date of receipt, and the name, address and telephone number of the contact person were recorded in the researcher’s log. Policy materials were provided by the member states within a four-week period.
Data Analysis

The analysis of the data used a four-step process: (a) creation of a coding system; (b) initial coding of the narrative; (c) pattern coding; and (d) synthesis of the data. The initial two steps in the data analysis process involved the use of dual coders to independently dissect the policies to create a coding system and the initial coding of the narrative. Dual coders were selected for these two steps in order to increase the level of reliability and to identify any coding difficulties.

Dr. Robert B. Donaldson, Professor of Public Administration at Governors State University in the College of Business and Public Administration, was selected as the second coder. Dr. Donaldson was selected because of his educational preparation, experience and interest in the area of public policy analysis. A four-hour training session was conducted to ensure his understanding of the purpose of the study, his use of the instructions, and his ability to engage the process as an independent participant.

Pilot Analysis

The first step after training was to conduct a pilot study with six member states to determine the following:

1. If the assessment and testing policies contain enough words, sentences and/or paragraphs in each research area to be worthy of coding.

2. If the dimensions of the characteristics for the research areas are mutually exclusive.

3. If the characteristics of each research area are clear and unambiguous enough to assure that the two independent coders would agree that a specific characteristic should or should not be coded (Holsti, 1969).
The pilot process began with each coder using index cards to identify and label key terms and jargon. The purpose was to provide each coder with the independent opportunity to make written notes of common themes, distinct differences and/or discrepancies. From these independent notes, the coders wrote separate memos to clarify ideas, integrate information and make differentiations in ideas. The coders discussed the memo to achieve definitional clarity of common themes, differences and/or discrepancies.

The discussion among the two coders identified the variables related to the following research questions: (1) with/without policy statement; (2) source of policy approval; (3) name; (4) target population and student classification affected; (5) intent and purpose; (6) monitor/audit; (7) institutional responsibilities; (8) policy expiration date; (9) sanctions; (10) academic areas assessed; and (11) type of data reported.

A cover page for each state policy was developed to record the presence of the 11 variables. It contained a space to record the state name, date of the policy, and yes or no responses to record the variables identified by the two coders. The second section of the cover page contained an area to evaluate the following qualities of each policy: (1) quality of policy language and (2) depth of explanation and space for comments (see Appendix C).

Next, the two coders used the cover sheets to determine the presence of the 11 categories for the six pilot study states and to write comments regarding the presence of common themes, differences and/or discrepancies. The two coders again wrote independent memos regarding the common themes, differences and/or discrepancies. A discussion of the memos was held to determine commonalities, differences and/or discrepancies. After the discussion, a single memo was written to establish commonality of findings.
From the data contained in the discussion and common memo, a broad typology of content was created and transferred to coding sheets that also identified the source of information (see Appendix D). The cover sheet and the coding sheet were used to code data, to gather other information relating to the research questions, and to make notes and comments.

As suggested by Miles and Huberman (1984), codes were written in the left margin of the cover sheet, and notes and comments were written in the right margin. Words, sentences and paragraphs were analyzed to determine if the content matched the characteristic on the coding sheet. If the policy content did not match any of the designated code headings and/or codes, it was added to the category it most closely resembled and written on the coding sheet. At the completion of coding, the codes were transferred to a coding chart for the six states chosen for the pilot.

The coded data from the coding chart were matched with the codes on the coding sheet by each of the codes. Each coder wrote a memo for discussion regarding any needed revisions to the coding sheet. At the conclusion of this discussion-revision process, a final typology was developed for pattern coding.

Miles and Huberman (1984) suggest a process for measurement of intercoder reliability. This process was performed on the data coded on the previous coding sheet and an expectation level of better than 76% was established.

\[
\text{Reliability} = \frac{\text{Number of Agreements}}{\text{Total number of agreements plus disagreements}}
\]

**Pattern Coding**

When the pilot process was concluded, the principal investigator became the sole pattern coder. The coding sheet guided the pattern coding process. To start the pattern coding, a chart
was designed to record data for each category. The coding process included reflective remarks made by the researcher regarding trends, surprises, omissions, etc. The chart was designed in a manner so that each category was separate. The tallying of observations was used to determine and note similarities. A research note was made to review the characteristics not used along with those that received low tallies. Tallies and notes were used to write a narrative description of the content of each category.

**Trustworthiness**

The trustworthiness of this qualitative study was established through the comprehensive description of its research design, data collection procedures and methods of analysis. The research methods of this study do not attempt to fit or manipulate data into predetermined set categories, such as those used in quantitative analysis. It is purely a descriptive account of what was stated in the policy statements as it emerges in response to the 12 research questions.

**Summary**

The research design, data collection procedures, and the background and training of the second coder were described in detail. The research design uses dual coders to explore and discover data to address 12 specific questions regarding statewide assessment policies for public higher education in the 19 member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Policies or related documents were obtained from each of the member states. A pilot study was conducted by the dual coders, and a code classification system was developed. The framework for the typology code classification was the 12 research questions that guided this study.

The data analyzed by each coder were recorded onto individual cover sheets for each state. Next, each coder developed an interim summary sheet to collate the findings, to assess the
confidence each coder held in his findings, and to note gaps and discrepancies. This procedure allowed the two coders to serve as a provisional synthesizer of what is known about the policy and helped to produce emergent themes. In addition, each cover sheet contained descriptions of policy style (language, depth of explanations and format) that were also discussed by the two coders in order to identify patterns of characteristics. The characteristics of each research area were discussed and modified by the two coders in order to maximize the mutual exclusiveness and the exhaustiveness of the potential characteristics.

The patterns and characteristics that emerged from the data were determined to be the most useful and descriptive system of categorization. Data were collected, tallied, categorized, and displayed in order to identify emergent themes. To formalize and systematize the thinking of each of the coders into a coherent set of findings, each generated memos to verify, examine and safeguard against premature and invalid closure (Miles & Huberman, 1985). The findings from this qualitative procedure are presented and discussed in Chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV

Results and Discussion

Introduction

This chapter is structured to present and discuss the information directly obtained from a content analysis of the assessment and testing policies of the 19 member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The research questions described in Chapter I served as the guide for analyses. The literature reviewed included previous research studies and doctoral dissertations; however, these studies were not directly related to the qualitative issues defined for this study. Many of the previous studies used the techniques of survey, interview and a pre-defined index to collect and measure data. Content analysis was selected over these other techniques in order to reduce investigator bias.

The starting point for the data collection in this study was to collect the assessment and testing policies of each of the 19 states. The following states were contacted: Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Minnesota, Missouri, Nebraska, New Mexico, North Dakota, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, Wisconsin, and Wyoming.

The initial phase of the coding process was used to determine the characteristics of the information sought. An intercoder reliability check was conducted when the dual coders had completed two interactions of initial coding. An intercoder reliability of 98% was recorded. The pattern coding of the data was conducted solely by the principal investigator.
Results

Policy documents from all 19 states were obtained for analysis. The qualitative analysis examined the characteristics of the policies individually and as a group to answer the research questions. Some of the policies and/or characteristics were combined in order to achieve a more coherent and congruent response. The findings that are presented in this chapter are divided into two sections: (1) data results and (2) a discussion of the results.

Data Results

The following results are provided in response to each research question and are presented in the numerical sequence stated in Chapter I.

Research Question #1 - This research question was concerned with, “which of the 19 states have written policies related to higher education assessment and testing?” This question is directly related to research Question #2, “which states do not have written policies?” This researcher combined these two research questions into one statement in order to obtain greater conceptual congruency and direct understanding of the dimensions of the population. The question was revised to state, “which states do and do not have written assessment and testing policies?” In addition, the date the policy was developed was added to further enhance the description.

In an analysis of the 19 states, 14 or 73%, had an assessment and testing policy, while 5, or 36%, of the states do not have a policy. The following tables, 1, 2, 3 and 4 are provided to display this data.
States with Assessment Testing Policies

Of the 14 member states that currently have a higher education assessment and testing policy, nine of these states were the earliest initiators of a policy and developed them between the years of 1985 and 1989. Table 1 presents the policies that were implemented during this four-year period.

Table 1. Policies Developed Between 1985 and 1989

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The most recent member states to implement an assessment and testing policy are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. Recent Member States to Implement Assessment and Testing Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Year Developed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>1995</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The following is a roster of those member states with an assessment and testing policy and the date of establishment.

**Table 3. States with Policy Statements**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>States with Policy Statements</th>
<th>Data Policy Established</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**States Without an Assessment and Testing Policy**

Five of the 19 member states, or 36%, do not have a state-directed or mandated assessment program. Table 4 is designed to display the rationale of each state for the absence of a statewide policy for higher education assessment and testing policy.

The names of the five states without a higher education assessment and testing policy are Indiana, Minnesota, Nebraska, New Mexico, and Wyoming. Table 4 presents the rationale provided by states for not having an assessment and testing policy.
Table 4. States Without Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Rationale</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Indiana</td>
<td>No legislative action. Commission on Higher Education does not have the authority to implement a policy.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minnesota</td>
<td>Legislature established a Task Force on Postsecondary Assessment in 1987. Since 1991 there has not been any state directives or mandates to develop a statewide assessment policy. High education assessment is not viewed as a priority initiative.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Nebraska</td>
<td>The Nebraska Commission for Postsecondary Education has expressed support for the outcome assessment requirement of North Central.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>New Mexico</td>
<td>Considers assessment the prerogative of the individual institution that is tailored to their own mission and circumstances, rather than requiring participation in a Central Common Assessment System. The Commission on Higher Education chose to lend its support to the assessment requirements of North Central rather than develop a redundant or competing mandate.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wyoming</td>
<td>The state of Wyoming does not have an all-encompassing board to oversee both the university and the community college. However, in 1991 the legislature established the Postsecondary Education Coordinating Council to stimulate dialogue and make recommendations to the legislature in regard to finance, governance and programs. This Council is composed of representatives from the legislature, community colleges, university, and the general public. To date the legislature has not developed or mandated an assessment and testing program. However, those institutions that seek North Central accreditation are required to establish an assessment and testing plan.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question #3** - What is the source of the origin of the policy statement? The purpose of this question was to determine the location and level of the leadership that initiated the development of each state-level assessment and testing policy.

From the analysis, the primary sources of policy initiation were the higher education regulatory boards \((n = 9)\), the state legislatures \((n = 4)\), and one governor. Table 5 presents the name of the source that initiated the policy, the date of origin, and the title of the policy.
Table 5. States with a Policy Developed by the Higher Education Regulatory Board

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Policy Title</th>
<th>Date of Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Regents Mandate</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Illinois Board of Higher Education Review of Undergraduate Education</td>
<td>1986</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Board of Regents Program Review</td>
<td>1991</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>Board of Regents Assessment Policy</td>
<td>1988</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>Strategic Plan</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>State Regents Policy</td>
<td>1994</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Mandated Regents, Rising Junior, Assessment Policy</td>
<td>1996</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>Higher Education Council Assessment Policy</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Board of Regents Accountability Policy</td>
<td>1993</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Five of the nine states with assessment and testing policies developed by the regulatory board initiated their policies during the period from 1991 to 1996, while the remaining four states developed their policies in the period between 1986 to 1989.

The second most frequent source of state assessment and testing policies was the state legislature. There are four states in this category. Table 6 provides a description of those states with policies developed by the legislature. The name of the state, title of the policy, and the date of origin are provided as indicators. All of the policies developed by state legislatures were initiated during the period between 1985 and 1989.
Table 6. Policies Developed by State Legislatures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Policy Title</th>
<th>Date of Origin</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Act 98</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>House Bill 1187</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>PA 286</td>
<td>1985</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>SB 140</td>
<td>1989</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Only one state, Missouri, cited the Governor as the policy initiator. The policy, entitled Assessment Program Student Achievement Policy, was developed in 1986. Table 7 provides a complete, state-by-state listing of the sources of statewide assessment development.

Five of 36%, of the state policies actually identify in the title of the policy, the word “assessment.” These states include Kansas, Missouri, South Dakota, West Virginia and Wisconsin.

Three, or 21%, of the state policies, Illinois, Iowa, and North Dakota, are connected to initiatives other than assessment. Illinois links its assessment and testing program to a comprehensive review of undergraduate education. Iowa links its assessment and testing policy to program review, while North Dakota’s program is linked to strategic planning. Illinois originally developed its program in 1986 but revised it in 1990. Iowa’s plan was developed in 1991 and North Dakota’s in 1996. These three states reflect the inclusion of a more comprehensive view of assessment and testing plans inside of new structured approaches.
Table 7. Composite List of Policies by Source, Origin and Name

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Policy Source</th>
<th>Date of Origin</th>
<th>Name of Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Board of Regents Mandate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Regulatory Board</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Act 98</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>HB 1187</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Regulatory Board</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Review of Undergraduate Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Regulatory Board</td>
<td>1991</td>
<td>Program Review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>Regulatory Board</td>
<td>1988</td>
<td>Assessment Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>1985</td>
<td>PA 286</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>1986</td>
<td>Assessment Program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>Regulatory Board</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Strategic Plan</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>SB 140</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Regulatory Board</td>
<td>1994</td>
<td>State Regents Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Regulatory Board</td>
<td>1996</td>
<td>Assessment Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>Regulatory Board</td>
<td>1989</td>
<td>Assessment Policy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Regulatory Board</td>
<td>1993</td>
<td>Assessment Policy</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Research Question #4** - The primary focus of this question was to determine if there were provisions of the policies that specifically targeted the policy to a given student population. Research question #11 also was concerned with obtaining data regarding what student classifications were affected by the policies. These two questions share a strong relationship. Therefore, the researcher has combined question #4 and #11 into one overarching question as follows: “What students are targeted and/or affected by the assessment and testing policy?”
In response to the above question, the data are divided into three parts. The first part describes the composition of the target population. The second part provides a description of student classifications affected by the policies. The final part is a comparison of part one to part two.

**Target Population**

All 14-state assessment and testing policies are directly targeted toward undergraduate students. This student population is reflective of the original target group in national reports and studies of student performance of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The purpose of these studies was to encourage the various states and higher education institutions to improve student performance. These improvement strategies are typical of states that developed policy initiatives in late 1989. These strategies were not only targeted toward undergraduate students but the strengths and weaknesses uncovered in these assessments were reflected toward the need for individual student improvement. However, North Central Association accreditation standards encouraged individual institutions to utilize more diverse methods and targets of outcome assessment such as enrollment, retention and graduation rates, number of students enrolled in remedial courses, the number of students who take remedial courses and successfully complete entry requirements, and number of degrees awarded.

**Student Classifications Affected by Policy**

A diverse number of student classifications is affected by the assessment policies. Table 8 presents data that illustrate the types of student classifications affected by the policies.
Table 8. Student Classifications Affected by State Policies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Student Classification</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Freshmen and Rising Juniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Open to Faculty Choice of undergraduate students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Juniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>Open to choice of undergraduate students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>Undergraduate classification affected are determined by each campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Freshmen, Rising Juniors and program outcome assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Junior Proficiency</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Rising Juniors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Five states have designated freshmen as the group affected by the policy. Those states are Arkansas, Colorado, Ohio, Oklahoma, and West Virginia. There are five states with “rising junior” programs: Arkansas, Michigan, Oklahoma, South Dakota, and Wisconsin. However, Michigan is the only state that targets its “rising junior” program to only one academic major, Education. Arkansas and Oklahoma have specifically designated multiple student classifications in their policies. Both Arkansas and Oklahoma have designated freshmen and rising juniors.

Most unique are the five states that allow the individual institutions to define what classifications will be assessed. They are reported Table 9.

### Table 9. States Allow the Individual Institution to Designate the Student Classification Affected

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Student Classification Affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Undergraduate</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Open to Faculty Choice of student classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>Institutions choice of undergraduate classification</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>Undergraduate classification affected are determined by each campus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 10 provides a comparison of the student population targeted by the policies and the student classifications affected by the policies. Four states, Arkansas, Michigan, South Dakota, and Wisconsin, designate juniors as the student classification affected.
Table 10. Student Classifications Targeted and Affected by the Policy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Target Population</th>
<th>Classifications Affected</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Freshmen and Rising Juniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Faculty choice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Juniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Open to institutions of undergraduate students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Classification determined by each campus</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Freshmen, Rising Juniors and program outcome assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Rising Juniors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Undergraduates</td>
<td>Rising Juniors</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The designation of freshmen as the targeted student classification does not measure the instructional performance of the institution but does measure the quality of the income student. This freshmen model of assessment and testing equates those students who perform poorly on the tests as either poor performers or the result of poor instructional practices on the part of previous institutions. Poor performance of freshmen during assessment has affected institutional instruction and curricula as remediation programs tailored to correct deficiencies have often been developed.
Research Question #5 - What are the stated intent and purposes of the policy?

The qualitative analyses attempted to determine if there were differences in the stated intent and purposes among the state policies. From the pilot study, three variables emerged for use in identifying differences: accountability, improving undergraduate education and teaching, and assessing achievement and/or proficiency.

Of the 14 states, six provide a multiple statement of intent and purpose for their assessment and testing policy. These states have expressed strong commitments in the area of improving undergraduate education, student learning and teaching, accountability, the enforcement of minimum standards, and the attainment of minimum proficiency.

The state of Oklahoma offers the most comprehensive multiple purpose expression of intent and purpose.

Oklahoma Assessment is used to maximize student success by improving teaching and learning skills, accountability and to assure the integrity of college degrees and other educational activities and goals.

The concept of accountability was the most frequently addressed by 13 of the states: Arkansas, Colorado, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, Michigan, Missouri, Ohio, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin. The characteristics of accountability include the words or concepts of quality and effectiveness, outcomes, enforcement of minimum standards, and the attainment of a proficiency.

Illinois offers a broad definition of accountability that provides the individual institutions the opportunity to define and describe what is accountability.
The state of West Virginia has an accountability process that is prescribed by law, SB 412, and is much more specific and directive than other policy statements.

West Virginia In addition to the assessment and testing policy, SB 412 directs the state higher education office to collect, analyze and report higher education data in order to “Make information available to parents, students, faculty, staff, state policy makers, and the general public on the quality and performance of public higher education.”

Iowa directs its accountability data into a systematic on-going program review process.

Iowa Provides an outcome assessment component to on-going program review efforts.

Wisconsin indicates the Board of Regents has structured specific measurable indicators of accountability.

Wisconsin Board of Regents adopted a core set of performance indicators to demonstrate accountability measures based on outcomes and includes both qualitative and quantitative indicators.

The second most frequently addressed focus of policy intent and purpose was the improvement of undergraduate education. Four states, Arizona, Illinois, Missouri, and North Dakota, indicate this characteristic of intent and purpose. The most definitive statement was provided by North Dakota.

North Dakota A comprehensive program to assess student achievement of learning goals as defined in the campus mission statement.

The third most referenced intent and purpose was the improvement of student learning and teaching. The states of Colorado, Iowa and Oklahoma referenced this concept. The state of
Colorado provided the most comprehensive yet general goal statement for the improvement of student learning.

Colorado To assess what students learned between entrance and graduation.

The Oklahoma policy was the most specific in defining the purpose of its assessment and the student classification targeted.

Oklahoma Subject to the approval of the Board of Regents, each college and university will develop criteria for the evaluation of students at college entry to determine academic preparation and course placement; mid-level assessment to determine basic skills competencies; exit assessment to evaluate outcomes in the student’s major and student perceptions regarding the quality of their faculty and academic programs.

There were three states that addressed student proficiency (Ohio, South Dakota, and West Virginia). The state of South Dakota provides the most specific guarantee of proficiency.

South Dakota The South Dakota Board of Regents guarantee that each of the graduates of its six universities has attained at least a minimum level of proficiency in a number of areas.

The following statements of intent and purpose are unique and/or singular to a given state:

Arkansas To provide data for the assessment of institutional performance rather than the performance of the individual student.

Kansas To stimulate appropriate educational reforms.

Michigan’s policy is intended to address only junior-level Education majors. The state does not have an assessment and testing policy that addresses the other academic majors or student classifications.
Michigan Define and enforce minimum standards which grow out of some concern of teachers' alleged lack of preparedness in subject areas.

In conclusion, the foregoing analysis has addressed the intent and purpose of each policy by identifying the key characteristics. The analysis is very helpful in identifying the performance expectations held for each higher education institution in each given state.

**Research Question #6** - Who monitors the policy? The purpose of this question is to determine who enforces or assures that the provisions of the state policy are being performed or met.

Thirteen, or 93%, of the 14 member states with a policy are monitored by a higher education regulatory board. Unique unto itself, the state of Colorado's policy is monitored by the Colorado Commission of Higher Education, the Governor, and the Colorado general assembly. Table 11 presents data that compare the source of each state's policy with the source of policy monitoring:

**Table 11. Comparison of Policy Source of Origin with the Monitoring Source**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Source of Policy Origin</th>
<th>Who Monitors the Policy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Regents Mandate</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Colorado</td>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>Commission of Higher Education, Governor and the General Assembly</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>Board of Higher Education</td>
<td>Board of Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>State Board of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Development Authority</td>
<td>Monitoring Authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------</td>
<td>----------------------</td>
<td>------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>Governor</td>
<td>Coordinating Board of Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>State Board</td>
<td>State Board of Higher Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Legislature</td>
<td>Commission of Education Improvement</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>West Virginia Higher Education</td>
<td>Council on Assessment, West Virginia Higher Education Council on Assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
<td>Board of Regents</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Nine, or 64%, of the 14 states had policies both developed and monitored by a higher education regulatory board. These states are Arizona, Illinois, Iowa, Kansas, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin.

Another two states, Arkansas and Michigan, had policies developed by the legislature but the monitoring was conducted by each state’s higher education regulatory board. While the Missouri policy originated with the Governor, it too is monitored by the state’s higher education regulatory board. Colorado’s policy was created in the legislature. However, it is monitored by the Governor, the legislature and the higher education regulatory board.

It was the expectation of this researcher that the legislature would play more of an essential role in monitoring because of the demands of the general public for more accountability in higher education. These data represent a significant shift from the policy position of the previous two decades.
Research Question #7 - Who is responsible for the supervision of the Policy? The purpose of this question is to collect data regarding who has been assigned the responsibilities for the daily operational implementation of the policy.

In the 14 states with higher education assessment and testing policies, the individual public institutions are responsible for operation of the state policy. The message is clear, 100% of the day-to-day operation and supervision of the assessment procedures are internal to the institutions and the monitoring of outcome performance is externally evaluated. This approach to policy oversight allows each institution to emphasize institutional assessment methods that best fit the needs of the college or university. The external monitoring process often requires the periodic reporting of institutional results to the state.

Research Question #8 - This question sought information as to whether a policy had an expiration period or life span.

Thirteen of the 14 states do not indicate any policy life span. North Dakota, however, indicates a seven-year plan for its program. The most significant changes have occurred in states that had an assessment and testing policy but later eliminated the policy. The following is a description of the changes that occurred in the states of Indiana, Minnesota and New Mexico.

Indiana For the period 1987-89, Indiana established a performance initiative to improve undergraduate education, stimulate curricular action and to publicly demonstrate the effectiveness of higher education to state level constituencies and the general public. In 1990, undergraduate assessment was no longer deemed a state level performance objective and instead, it was regarded to be more appropriate within the provisions of institutional responsibilities.
Minnesota

In 1987, the legislature passed a bill establishing a Task Force on Postsecondary Quality Education. This task force was directed to study the objectives of assessment and how it could be used to improve postsecondary education. The task force, a pilot assessment program, was established within each of the public postsecondary systems in the state. The primary purpose of the program was to improve teaching and learning and to provide accountability to students, citizens and policy makers.

A report from each pilot, as well as an external evaluation, was presented to the coordinating board and the legislature. The pilot was scheduled to sunset in June 1989. However, the legislature re-authorized the task force through 1991. Currently, assessment is based at the institutions. There is no state level collection or reporting of assessment results.

New Mexico

In 1990, the legislature passed HB4 which required postsecondary institutions to submit an annual report card to the Governor and the legislature which included results of an assessment initiative on learning outcomes. When the first report card was published in 1990, the commission found that institutional assessment programs varied widely. Based upon these data the commission recommended that each state institution develop assessment programs tailored to its own mission and circumstances rather than being required to participate in any central common assessment system.

These three states represent a significant change from the character of assessment in the mid-1970s to early 1980s that structured the higher education assessment process to primarily the
testing of students' academic competency and/or proficiencies in designated areas. These efforts at assessment were used for the summative evaluation of student skills to demonstrate effectiveness or the lack of it. Students who performed poorly on these tests were seen as either poor performers or the products of poor instructional practices. These poor performers were often seen as needing remedial assistance before they were allowed to academically proceed with the program.

**Research Question #9** - This question sought data regarding what sanctions are imposed upon institutions that fail to achieve the policy provisions.

Only six of the states indicate specific sanctions.

**Arkansas**
Performance funding goes to those institutions that demonstrate success in courses in the 35-hour state minimum core. Courses include composition, mathematics, natural sciences, arts and humanities, and social sciences.

**Colorado**
Colorado’s coordinating board has the authority to decrease an institution’s budget by 2% if the institution does not implement an accountability program.

The state of Iowa implies sanctions will be imposed as a result of its “program review” process. Outcome assessment is only one component to Iowa’s on-going program review efforts. The Michigan assessment program is targeted towards junior-level students in teacher education and more directly prevents individual student progress rather than academic program or institutional progress.

Surprisingly, few states listed specific sanctions. The policies of seven of the states, North Dakota, Oklahoma, South Dakota, West Virginia, and Wisconsin, lack sufficient details to
determine specifically what will be imposed. Illinois is very specific in stating that funding is not
linked to assessment results.

All of the policies indicate that state policymakers and the general public will be informed
in some manner regarding findings and improvements. The implications associated with these
reports appear to be the primary means of sanction. The standards associated with quality
education also appear to be the continued enforcement emphasis of regional and professional
accrediting associations. Colleges and universities appear to be very responsive to the assessment
requirements of these associations.

**Research Question #10** - What academic areas does the policy indicate will be assessed?

Table 12 provides a summary of state requirements.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Statement of Academic Area</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arizona</td>
<td>Pre-Professional Skills Test (Basic skills and general education)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Arkansas</td>
<td>Freshmen - ACT, SAT or ASSET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Rising Junior - Arkansas Assessment of General Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>All students - student proficiencies, ACT-CAAP</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illinois</td>
<td>General education and skills development</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iowa</td>
<td>Faculty decision of the areas by program</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kansas</td>
<td>Basic skills, general education, and major field - instruments used to assess</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>are determined by institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Michigan</td>
<td>Basic skills and major subject</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Missouri</td>
<td>General education and major field</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Dakota</td>
<td>Areas determined by the institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ohio</td>
<td>Institutionally determined</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>State</td>
<td>Statement of Academic Area</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>--------------</td>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oklahoma</td>
<td>Entering students – ACT</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Mid-level or at the end of the degree program - institutionally determined tests of competencies in reading, writing, mathematics, and critical thinking</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Program outcome - institutionally determined major field assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Preference for nationally normed instruments such as GRE, NTE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Dakota</td>
<td>Sophomores - proficiency tests in quantitative skills, problem-solving and scientific reasoning - ACT-CAAP instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>West Virginia</td>
<td>ACT or SAT for entering freshmen</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Entering freshmen test in math, reading and English composition for placement in college level English and math courses</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wisconsin</td>
<td>Sophomore competency test in writing and math (ACT-CAAP)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This researcher expected the higher education policies to be consistent in their usage of basic skills and general education as the primary areas of assessment. Only one of the 14 state policies allows the institutions and/or faculty the right to select the areas to be assessed.

Iowa

The specific choices as to what outcomes assessment will be undertaken is a faculty choice based on the nature of the academic discipline.

**Research Question #11** - What student classifications are affected by the assessment policies? This research question was combined with Research Question #4.

**Research Question #12** - This question is concerned with how assessment data are compared. All of the data are reported by the individual institutions. Only three of the states develop data that can be compared (Arkansas, South Dakota, and Wisconsin). These three states
report each institution's use of common measurement instruments and approaches. While these states produce data for inter-state comparison, intra-state comparison is not possible because of instrumentation differences. For the most part, the institution-centered assessment approach allows the individual institution a means to address accountability. Like the accrediting associations, these policies emphasize the building of assessment procedures and database information at the individual institution.

**Policy Style Analysis**

Each of the policies contained introductory statements. These statements were usually limited to three or four sentences such as the following from Oklahoma.

Oklahoma

The Constitution of Oklahoma charges the Oklahoma State Regents for Higher Education with responsibility for prescribing standards for admissions, retention, and graduation application to each institution in the Oklahoma State System of Higher Education. The State Regents also have the responsibility to provide leadership in the coordination of the orderly transfer of students between and among institutions of the state system. Inherent in such responsibilities is the prescribing of mechanisms to monitor and facilitate the assessment of students for the purposes of instructional improvement and state system accountability.

The introductory section of each state policy tended to include information about the goals and purposes of the policy. Policy statements averaged five to seven pages. Comprehensive assessment policies that included multiple data indicators to be collected were longer at five to 20 pages in length. Illinois tended to be the longest at 48 pages.
The language and format were written for the understanding and use by the public at-large. Procedures and expectations were described in formal language such as “shall” and “must.” The statements developed by the legislature were more formal than those developed by regulatory boards.

**Discussion**

This study provides a description of significant components of the assessment and testing policies of the member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. When combined, the data and the policy descriptions provide insight into the policies of the member states. This study contributes comprehensive information regarding state-level policy activities and thus provides current data to guide the meaningful improvement of higher education assessment and testing policies.

**Demographic Summary**

Fourteen, or 74%, of the 19 member states have statewide higher education assessment and testing policies. Five of the 19 member states do not have an assessment and testing policy; however, four of these five states previously had an operative policy statement but eliminated it. Nine of the states with current assessment and testing policies had policies developed by each state’s higher education regulatory board; four by the state legislature; and one by a governor. All 14 states target their programs to undergraduate students. Six of the 14 member states with assessment policies report multiple purposes; 13 states include the concept of accountability; four indicate the improvement of undergraduate education; and three indicate the improvement of student learning and teaching. The monitoring/auditing of state outcomes is performed by the higher education regulatory board in 13 of the states. While the monitoring of outcomes is performed by the higher education regulatory board, the daily operation and supervision of the
assessment programs are totally performed by the individual institution. Thirteen of the 14 state policies do not provide a sunset clause. Six of the states with assessment and testing policies indicate some form of sanction. The ACT-CAAP tests are the most commonly used instruments. Eleven of the states do not have a common benchmark to measure institutions of higher education.

While the data indicate that 93% of the policies are monitored or audited by the state higher education regulatory board, the data derived from each institution are specific and had noncomparable results.

It is not surprising that any of the higher education assessment policy provisions required adherence by private colleges and universities. Jones (1993) reports that less than a third of the nation's colleges have advanced beyond the planning stage in implementing broad-based assessment programs. He states that many of the institutions that have introduced an outcome assessment program have done so due to state policies and accrediting agency requirements. Furthermore, much of this reflects a compliance mode rather than a commitment to improvement.

Surprisingly, four of the five states without higher education assessment and testing policies indicate they previously had a policy but eliminated them. McGuinness (1994) indicates that during the period of 1989 to 1991 some states put their assessment policies on hold. He cites fiscal constraints as well as opposition from institutional leaders. Regardless, it is difficult to understand why the public cry for accountability has not overridden these objections.

It is surprising that more states do not utilize statewide comparison data because of their stated need for accountability and to improve teaching and learning. Jones et al., 1995 believes states should plan comparisons in ways that encourage cooperation rather than competition among institutions. He believes institution reports should avoid simplistic "report cards" of single
measures that lead to direct comparisons of institutions and, instead, should adhere to a standard of optimal performance and progress from year-to-year.

While most states and their institutions utilized the SAT and/or the ACT for higher education admission, surprisingly only four states (Arizona, Arkansas, South Dakota, and Wisconsin) employ a common instrument for testing. The National Assessment of College Student Learning (1996) indicates these common instruments are used to help address the demand for public accountability. They believe the absence of common outcome measurements across the states appears to be less of a matter of deliberate policy choice than one of operational and fiscal necessity.

The data provides a description of the current status of state-level higher education testing policies of the member states of the North Central Association of College and Schools. The research has also revealed a shift and a change of character in these policies since the mid-1980s. Most of the higher education assessment and testing policies developed or revised in the 1990s appear to be linked to other state policy initiatives such as completion rates, instructional cost and funding. However, very few of the member states linked their higher education assessment and testing programs to the on-going K-12 policy initiatives statewide.

**Policy Content**

It was encouraging to find that the majority of the North Central Association member states have developed and implemented higher education assessment and testing policies. However, it was disappointing that few states link their higher education assessment policies to the assessment policies of the K-12 system as part of a comprehensive approach to assessment and evaluation. This comprehensive assessment and evaluation would help in the determination of strengths and weaknesses of the operation and functioning of the entire state education system,
target resources, enforcement of minimum standards of achievement, and accountability reporting. Furthermore, policy consideration should be given to the potential inclusion of private colleges and universities who receive state funds. Should all institutions that receive public tax dollars be subject to limited indicators of accountability?

The history of American higher education indicates that assessment is not new. However, the mandating of assessment by state higher education regulatory boards and legislatures is relatively new to higher education. The current procedures of the assessment policies do not appear to produce data that would ensure any greater accountability or changes in educational procedures than at other periods of time in American higher education. The mandating of outcome assessment appears to communicate more "noise" than new substantive data. For the most part, data derived from these new assessment processes are not significant from data obtained through program reviews and accreditation evaluations.

The majority of the assessment policies of the North Central Association member states did not include provisions that would provide standards and procedures for institutional comparison. However, the policies do require institutions to report assessment data to state higher education regulatory boards and offer various policymakers. Regardless of the use of these data, the external reporting of assessment data can be considered to be a "report card" of institutional performance. The data included in these reports appear to be inappropriate for use in institution-to-institution comparison.

Summary

This study was designed to develop a compendium of the statewide assessment policies of the member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. It revealed that 14, or 74%, of the 19 member states have assessment policies. Nine of the 14 states with a policy
were initiated by each state's higher education regulatory board. Five of the nine states with policies developed by the higher education regulatory board were initiated during the period from 1991 to 1996. The remaining four were established during the period 1986 to 1989. The second most frequent source of policy origin was the state legislature (n = 4). Only one state had a policy initiated by the governor. Three of the state policies are connected to initiatives other than assessment.

All 14 states with assessment policies target those policies to undergraduate students. Five states designate freshmen as the group targeted by the policy. Also, five of the states allow the individual institutions to define what students will be assessed.

Six states report multiple statements of intent and purpose for their assessment policy. Thirteen of the states indicate accountability as their primary intent and purpose. The second most frequently addressed policy intent used by four states was the improvement of undergraduate education. Three states indicate that student learning and teaching are the focus of their state assessment policies. Finally, three other states indicate that assessing student proficiency is the primary purpose of the policies.

Thirteen of the member states with a policy are monitored by a regulatory board. Colorado is monitored by the Commission of Higher Education, the Governor and the legislature. Nine of the 13 states had policies both developed and monitored by a higher education regulatory board. Two states had policies developed by the legislature. While Missouri was the only state with a policy developed by the governor, the policy was monitored by the state higher education regulatory board.

All 14 states have delegated to each higher education institution the responsibilities for the daily operation and supervision of the policy. The majority of the assessment policies that were
developed prior to 1990 do not set forth clear sanctions that could be imposed for not implementing the policy provisions and/or for poor performance.

Six of the states indicated the use of performance funding incentives as a policy sanction. Eleven of the 14 policies allow the individual institutions to structure the assessment procedures and activities to be used; while four states specify the assessment instruments to be used. Since all 14-state policies are institutionally administered, there are no common instruments and data for comparison with other institutions.

Chapter V will summarize the findings, draw conclusions and make recommendations.
CHAPTER V
SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to conduct a content analysis of statewide higher education policies that focus on student outcome assessment for each of the 19 member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. This chapter provides a summary of the study, conclusions reached, recommendations for policy changes and the creation of new policies, and suggestions for future research.

Summary

This study was based on the assumption that there is value in systematically collecting and analyzing outcomes-based testing policies for higher education institutions developed by the 19 states which comprise the membership of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The specific objectives of the study were:

1. To collect policy documents from North Central Association member states regarding any statewide assessment and testing programs that exist.

2. To analyze these documents in response to specific questions developed for this study.

3. To develop a compendium of the common themes found among these documents.

To guide the content analysis, 12 specific research questions were developed:

1. Which of the 19 member states have written policies related to higher education assessment?

2. Which states without a higher education assessment and testing policy are involved in a process of developing a policy statement?

3. What sources of approval exist for the policy?

4. What types of institutions are the focus of the policy?
5. What are the intent and purpose of the policy?

6. What agency is responsible for monitoring the policy?

7. Who is responsible at the individual institutional level for the implementation of the policy?

8. Does the policy define the period of time during which the policy will be active?

9. What sanctions are set for institutional failure to carry out provisions of the policy?

10. What areas are assessed/tested?

11. What is the status of students to be assessed/tested?

12. Are institutional data to be used to compare outcomes across institutions within each state?

To obtain data related to each research question, a qualitative methodology was developed and implemented. Letters were sent to each state's higher education regulatory board requesting a copy of its statewide assessment and testing policy. Upon receipt of the policy statements, an initial coding was conducted. The two initial steps involved the use of dual coders to independently analyze the policies to create a coding system and to code the narratives. In the second phase of the data analysis, the principal researcher became the sole coder. Coding sheets guided the pattern coding process. The findings of this study are reported in Chapter IV and consolidated in the conclusions section.

**Conclusions**

It should be understood that the development and implementation of higher education assessment and testing policy involve a dynamic process, and some policies may have changed by the time this study was completed.
The following chart displays the themes derived from the content analysis of the state assessment and testing policies. The themes that were presented provide a description of what was found, rather than an explanation of what was found.

**Summary of Themes**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Number of States with Policies</th>
<th>14 states</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Source of Policy</td>
<td>Higher Education Regulatory Board, second theme, State Legislature</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Target Population</td>
<td>Undergraduate students</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Intent and Purpose</td>
<td>Public accountability and the improvement of teaching and learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring Policy</td>
<td>Higher Education Regulatory Board</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supervision</td>
<td>Individual institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Policy Expiration Period</td>
<td>Most do not have a defined period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sanctions</td>
<td>Performance incentive for most recently developed programs. Older policies have no defined expiration period.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Areas Being Assessed/Tested</td>
<td>Basic skills and general education. Some institutions have been given the right to determine the areas to be assessed/tested.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Student Status</td>
<td>Freshman and sophomore. Some institutions have the right to select the student population.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Data Reports</td>
<td>Data are reported by the individual institutions and are not compared.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The data characteristics obtained from the states were remarkably congruent. They manifested a viewpoint that was consistent with the one promoted by the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. Individual colleges and universities within each state assumed responsibility for the development and implementation of assessment and testing methods and procedures. This practice allowed for the consideration of the diverse educational missions that exist among the state-supported institutions, and the differences among the types of students served.
Private colleges and universities are exempted from the execution of these policies. For the most part, state higher education regulatory boards have not been given the jurisdictional authority to require the compliance of private institutions with these assessment regulations. In this sense, public institutions are treated like any other state-supported agency, and the private colleges and universities are treated like private corporations.

The majority of the assessment and testing policies were developed by state higher education regulatory boards for the intent and purpose of public accountability and to improve teaching and learning. Under each policy, the regulatory boards maintain the authority to monitor the institution’s compliance with the state policy. However, each institution was responsible for submitting a report to the regulatory board. Since these reports contain data components developed by the individual institutions, they provide the kind of information that is often too diverse and complex for general public understanding.

Generally, basic academic skills and general education were the primary areas assessed and tested. Some institutions had been given the authority to determine what areas will be assessed/tested in accordance with their mission and goals. Each institution had the responsibility and authority to develop its own directions and guidelines for success and improvement. However, the majority of the policies did not specifically set forth sanctions for noncompliance, policy expiration periods, nor procedures for policy revision. However, a growing number of states were developing performance incentives. Data in these individual reports were not compared among the institutions largely because they were not from the same data sources.

The undergraduate student (freshman and sophomore) is the primary target population of these policies. Basic academic skills and general education were the areas most frequently
assessed/tested. Some institutions had given the authority to select the student population and/or areas that were assessed/tested.

The writing style of these policies needs improvement. Concepts were described in general terms. Specific description and explanation are needed as well as specific examples of what was being requested. The tone and language of the policies appeared to be intended for educational administrators and legislators.

**Recommendations**

The findings and conclusions have led the researcher to pose two sets of recommendations in the areas of policy improvement and future research.

**Policy Improvement Recommendations**

1. To address the continued issues related to public accountability, the inclusion of other public constituencies in the process should be made in order to increase the unity of vision and expectation held for the process.

2. A policy review procedure should be developed in an effort to validate the currency and reliability of the process. This policy could be included as a component of a strategic planning process. This process will help to determine what is working and what is not.

3. The assessment and testing policy should be revised to include those private institutions that are receiving state funds for academic program operation and student financial aid. Private institutions should also be accountable for their use of public funds.

4. To increase the level of public accountability for the use of state funds, assessment and testing policies should be expanded to include upper division, graduate and professional school students. Graduate and professional school education represents the greatest
student cost of education. Consideration can be given to issues related to licensure and certification rates.

5. State assessment and testing policies should identify common areas for comparison among the institutions, i.e., rising junior or general education assessment and testing at the conclusion of the sophomore year. The freshman and sophomore years are the primary periods of general education instruction. The assessment and testing of freshmen focuses the learning-teaching responsibilities on the elementary and secondary education level.

6. Policy language should avoid jargon and provide explanations when needed. If the intent of policies is to be flexible in their requirements, explanation and examples should be provided.

**Further Research**

More research is needed concerning statewide higher education assessment and testing.

Further research is recommended in the following areas:

1. It is recommended that a similar study be conducted of the member states of the other five regional accrediting associations and to compare findings with those from this study. These studies should be updated and conducted periodically.

2. A finding of this study was that assessment and testing data are institutionally centered and are not easily comparable with other institutions because common assessment/testing tools and reporting processes are not utilized. It is recommended that further research be conducted to identify and compare assessment and testing tools and reporting processes.

3. This study identified public accountability as the most prevalent intent and purpose behind statewide testing for the member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. It is recommended that further studies should be conducted to determine what
programs and activities have been developed in response to findings of poor accountability and institutional performance.

4. It is recommended that further research be conducted to profile the common themes found in institutional and regulatory board reports on outcomes assessment issues and topics.

5. It is recommended that research be periodically conducted to identify and compare what outcome assessment and testing practices result from state higher education assessment and testing policy, professional licensure requirements, certification mandates or regional accreditation requirements.

**Conclusion**

This study is the only existing research that specifically describes the statewide, higher education assessment and testing policies of member states of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. The results of this study have yielded a comprehensive description of policy content. The findings of this study may be helpful in the development and/or evaluation of state and institutional assessment and testing policies. There is a need for the improvement of policy guidelines that will allow for clear and distinct policy making processes and policy implementation procedures.
APPENDIX A

INITIAL COVER LETTER
May 1997

As a doctoral candidate in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies at Loyola University--Chicago, I am currently conducting a study of the outcomes assessment and testing policies of those states that comprise the membership of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools. This study is a content analysis of the policy statement in response to twelve (12) research questions (attached is a copy of the research questions). The data obtained in response to these research questions will be used to develop a compendium of the state policies.

To complete this study, I am requesting your assistance in obtaining a copy of your state’s higher education assessment and testing policy. I would appreciate if you would forward to me a copy of your state’s assessment and testing policy in the enclosed stamped, self-addressed envelope.

If you need to contact me regarding this matter, please telephone me at work (708) 534-4516 or home (708) 747-0381.

Thank you in advance for your cooperation and assistance.

Sincerely,

Burton A. Collins
University Professor
Governors State University

BC/lpk
Enclosure
APPENDIX B

FOLLOW-UP COVER LETTER
May 23, 1997

Dear

APPENDIX B

A few days ago I mailed a package to you requesting a copy of your state’s Higher Education Assessment and Testing Policy. I am again requesting your assistance in obtaining this document in order to complete a doctoral study of the higher education assessment and testing policies of the member states that comprise the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools.

This study utilizes the techniques of content analysis in response to twelve (12) research questions. The data derived from the policies in response to the research questions will be used to develop a compendium.

In order to complete this study, it is absolutely essential that I obtain a copy of your state’s policy. I have enclosed a stamped, self-addressed envelope for you to forward your policy. I would greatly appreciate it if you would forward the policy copy within the next few days.

If you need to contact me regarding this matter, please telephone me at work (708) 534-4516 or home (708) 747-0381. Thank you.

Sincerely,

Burton A. Collins
University Professor
Governors State University

BC/lpk
Enclosure
APPENDIX C

COVER PAGE
Cover Page

State ____________________________

Date of Policy ____________________________

Research Issued Addressed

_____ Yes  _____ No  Policy Statement

_____ Yes  _____ No  Source of Policy Approval

_____ Yes  _____ No  Policy Name

_____ Yes  _____ No  Target Population and Student Classification Affected

_____ Yes  _____ No  Intent and Purpose

_____ Yes  _____ No  Monitor/Audit

_____ Yes  _____ No  Institution Responsibility

_____ Yes  _____ No  Policy Expiration Date

_____ Yes  _____ No  Sanctions

_____ Yes  _____ No  Academic Areas Assessed

_____ Yes  _____ No  Type of Data Reported

Language

Informal    Mixed    Formal

Depth of Explanation

Vague       Mixed   Formal

Comments:__________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________

_________________________________________________________________
APPENDIX D

TYPOLOGY/CODING CHART
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Codes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>I. Policy</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>P = Yes</td>
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<td>P = No</td>
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| **II. Source of Policy Approval** |
| SPA 2 |
| SPA Regents Mandate | SPA-RM 2a |
| SPA Regents Objective | SPA-RO 2b |
| SPA Governors Mandate | SPA-GM 2c |
| SPA Governors Objective | SPA-GO 3d |
| SPA Legislative Mandate | SPA-LM 2e |
| SPA Legislative Objective | SPA-LO 2f |
| SPA Other | SPA-O 2g |

| **III. Name and Date** |
| ND 3 |
| ND Public Law | ND-PL 3a |
| ND Legislative Act | ND-LA 3b |
| ND Assessment Plan/Programs | ND-AP 3c |
| ND Regulatory Board Policy | ND-RBP 3d |
| ND Governors Policy | ND-GP 3e |
| ND Other | ND-O 3f |

| **IV. Target Population & Student Classification Affected** |
| TPSCA 4 |
| TPSCA Undergraduate | TPSCA-U 4a |
| TPSCA Freshman | TPSCA-F 4b |
| TPSCA Rising Junior | TPSCA-RJ 4c |
| TPSCA Faculty Choice | TPSCA-FC 4d |
TPSCA Institutional Choice  \( \text{TPSCA-IC} \)  4e
TPSCA Student Choice  \( \text{TPSCA-SC} \)  4f
TPSCA Sophomore  \( \text{TPSCA-C} \)  4g

**V. Intent and Purpose**  \( \text{IP} \)  5
- IP Accountability  \( \text{IP-A} \)  5a
- IP Improve Undergraduate Education  \( \text{IP-IUE} \)  5b
- IP Improve Teaching  \( \text{IP-IT} \)  5c
- IP Assess Proficiency or Achievement  \( \text{IP-APA} \)  5d
- IP Educational Reform  \( \text{IP-ER} \)  5e
- IP Other  \( \text{IP-O} \)  5f

**VI. Monitor/Audit**  \( \text{MA} \)  6
- MA Regents/Regulatory Board  \( \text{MA-RRB} \)  6a
- MA Legislature  \( \text{MA-L} \)  6b
- MA Governor  \( \text{MA-G} \)  6c
- MA Other  \( \text{MA-O} \)  6d

**VII. Institutional Supervisory Responsibility**  \( \text{ISR} \)  7
- ISA Daily Operation and Supervision  \( \text{ISR-DOS} \)  7a
- ISA None  \( \text{ISR-N} \)  7b
- ISA Other  \( \text{ISR-O} \)  7b

**VIII. Policy Expiration Date**  \( \text{PED} \)  8
- PED Date  \( \text{PED-D} \)  8a
- PED No Date Stated  \( \text{PED-NDS} \)  8b
- PED Other  \( \text{PED-O} \)  8c
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<tr>
<th>IX. Sanctions</th>
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<tr>
<td>S Performance Funding</td>
<td>S-PF</td>
<td>9a</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Reprimand</td>
<td>S-R</td>
<td>9b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S Restitution</td>
<td>S-Rest</td>
<td>9c</td>
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<tr>
<td>S Administrative Discipline</td>
<td>S-AD</td>
<td>9d</td>
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<tr>
<td>S Other</td>
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<td>9e</td>
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<th>X. Academic Area Assessed</th>
<th>AAA</th>
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<tr>
<td>AAA Basic Skills</td>
<td>AAA-BS</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAA General Education</td>
<td>AAA-GE</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAA Major Field</td>
<td>AAA-MF</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAA Graduation Comprehensive Exam</td>
<td>AAA-GCE</td>
<td>10d</td>
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<td>AAA Faculty Choice</td>
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<tr>
<td>AAA Institutional Choice</td>
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<td>AAA Other</td>
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<th>XI. Type of Data Report or Comparison</th>
<th>DRC</th>
<th>11</th>
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<tr>
<td>DRC Annual Institutional Report</td>
<td>DRC-AIR</td>
<td>11a</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC Semi-Annual Report</td>
<td>DRC-SAR</td>
<td>11b</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC Annual Institution Comparison</td>
<td>DRC-AIC</td>
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<tr>
<td>DRC Other</td>
<td>DRC-O</td>
<td>11d</td>
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APPENDIX E

PATTERN CODING CHART
## Pattern Coding Chart

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Category of Content</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
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<td>With/Without Policy</td>
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<td>PY</td>
<td>13</td>
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### Observation/Comments
REFERENCES


VITA

Burton A. Collins has served as a Student Affairs Professional in higher education for 22 years at Governors State University, University Park, Illinois. He is currently a member of the faculty of the Division of Psychology and Counseling at Governors State University. He is co-author of American College-Testing Proficiency Examination Program for advanced upper-division placement of nursing students graduated from hospital-based (diploma) nursing programs.
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Dissertation Approval Sheet

This dissertation submitted by Burton A. Collins has been read and approved by the following committee:

Terry E. Williams, Ph.D., Director, Associate Professor, Educational Leadership and Policy Studies, Loyola University, Chicago.

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David E. Suddick, Ph.D., University Professor, College of Education, Governors State University.

The final copies have been examined by the director of the dissertation and the signature which appears below verifies the fact that any necessary changes have been incorporated and that the dissertation is now given final approval by the committee with reference to content and form.

The dissertation is, therefore, accepted in partial fulfillment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Education.

December 1, 1997
Date

Terry E. Williams
Director's Signature