Demonstrating Effectiveness in Higher Education through Accreditation: An Analytical Review of How the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges' Accreditation Standards on Institutional Effectiveness and Student Learning Are Impacted by the Internal Environment of Select Institutions

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ABSTRACT

EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

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DEMONSTRATING EFFECTIVENESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH ACCREDITATION: AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF HOW THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS COMMISSION ON COLLEGES’ ACCREDITATION STANDARDS ON INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING ARE IMPACTED BY THE INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT OF SELECT INSTITUTIONS

Committee Chair: Dr. Barbara Hill
Dissertation Dated May 2014

In the United States, measuring and documenting institutional effectiveness in postsecondary educational institutions is not a one-size-fits-all process. Although this can be effectively accomplished in a variety of ways, the best approach for any higher education institution is one that is tailored to the institution’s unique environment and directly supports its mission. Nevertheless, there are common factors that can greatly influence institutions’ ability to measure and demonstrate levels of effectiveness directly tied to student learning.
This qualitative study was designed to gain an understanding of how factors within a higher education environment, including structure, practices and processes, can impact the institution’s ability to evidence institutional effectiveness related to student learning. The study examined institutional effectiveness as defined by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), and reviewed specific components of student learning assessment through SACSCOC Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 (Institutional Effectiveness – Educational Programs).

The researcher applied a multi-site case study approach to gain an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon. Through purposeful sampling, seven higher education institutions were selected from the 2011/2012 SACSCOC Reaffirmation Class. The phenomenon was studied at each institution as a single case, and using Yin’s cross-experiment logic, a cross case analysis was also conducted. In addition, to attain the most compelling results from this multi-site case study, both literal and theoretical replication (Yin, 1989) was employed.

The researcher concluded that there were four significant variables that impacted the ability of the institutions to sufficiently evidence institutional effectiveness associated with student learning. These variables included leadership, institutional culture, resource allocation, and the planning and assessment processes at the institutions.
DEMONSTRATING EFFECTIVENESS IN HIGHER EDUCATION THROUGH ACCREDITATION: AN ANALYTICAL REVIEW OF HOW THE SOUTHERN ASSOCIATION OF COLLEGES AND SCHOOLS COMMISSION ON COLLEGES' ACCREDITATION STANDARDS ON INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STUDENT LEARNING ARE IMPACTED BY THE INTERNAL ENVIRONMENT OF SELECT INSTITUTIONS

A DISSERTATION
SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF DOCTOR OF EDUCATION

BY

TIA A. MINNIS

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

ATLANTA, GEORGIA

MAY 2014
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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Across the nation, as a best practice, post-secondary education institutions are expected to engage in on-going planning and assessment. This process is designed to ensure that the stated mission of the institution, which often centers on student learning, is accomplished through continuous improvements of programs and services, and ultimately, the creation of an environment that produces high caliber successful graduates. The overall effectiveness of these institutions in accomplishing this is often determined based on established standards of external accrediting agencies.

There are four different types of accrediting agencies recognized in the United States; regional, national faith-related, national career-related, and programmatic (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges [SACSCOC], 2011). Regional accrediting agencies, which accredit the entire institution, are the most recognized form of accreditation. There are six regional accrediting agencies in the United States responsible for the accreditation of degree-granting institutions in the higher education community. These agencies monitor higher education institutions through measurable performance criteria to ensure that the programs and services they provide meet acceptable levels of quality (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). These
accrediting agencies are (a) the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools - Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), (b) New England Association of Schools and Colleges - Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE), (c) North Central Association of Colleges and Schools - The Higher Learning Commission (NCA-HLC), (d) Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), (e) Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), and (f) Western Association of Schools and Colleges - Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (WASC-ACCJC), and Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC-ACSCU). Figure 1 provides an overview of the states that fall within each of the six accrediting regions.

Figure 1. Regional Accreditation Map. Adapted from NSSE Institute (2013). NSSE Institute Regional Accreditation Toolkits. Retrieved from NSSE Institute: http://nsse.iub.edu/?cid=136
These six non-profit regional accrediting agencies are recognized by the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), and the United States Department of Education, as the authority on educational quality and institutional effectiveness.

Accreditation of postsecondary education institutions by a regional accrediting agency is a voluntary, self-regulatory and peer-reviewed process. It can be viewed as an endorsement that validates the institution as an equal in the national competitive arena of higher education. In essence, the achievement of accreditation provides a benchmark for higher education institutions to assert the quality of the institution’s programs and services, the caliber of its graduates, and the overall effectiveness of the institution in carrying out its mission. Attaining and/or maintaining accreditation is a significant facet of survival for many higher education institutions. To receive accreditation, institutions must be able to demonstrate that they have met the required level of quality for the criteria outlined with each standard monitored by their respective accrediting agency. Additionally, maintaining accreditation is based on the institutions’ ability to demonstrate continued adherence to the established criteria.

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is the regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the southern region. The 11 states included in the southern region are Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia. SACSCOC accredits institutions in each of these states that award associates, baccalaureate, masters, and doctoral degrees
The southern region is also comprised of institutions in Latin America, as well as other international sites (SACSCOC, 2013a).

SACS Commission on Colleges aims to enhance educational quality and improve institutional effectiveness throughout the region by ensuring that member institutions meet standards established by the higher education community (SACSCOC, 2013a). According to SACSCOC, accreditation “plays a significant role in fostering public confidence in the educational enterprise, in maintaining standards, in enhancing institutional effectiveness, and in improving higher education” (SACSCOC, 2005, 1). Each institution within the region is classified by the highest degree level offered at the institution. The institution levels range from Level I—which includes institutions that offer associate degrees only, to Level VI— institutions that offer four or more doctoral degrees. Table 1 provides a description of each of the levels of classification assigned to institutions by SACSCOC.

Table 1

*SACS Commission on Colleges Institution Classification*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level I</td>
<td>Associate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level II</td>
<td>Baccalaureate degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level III</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level IV</td>
<td>Master’s degree and Education Specialist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level V</td>
<td>Three or fewer doctoral degrees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level VI</td>
<td>Four or more doctoral degrees</td>
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*Note.* Adapted from SACSCOC 2009-2010 Annual Report and Proceedings, p. 15.
There are more than 800 SACSCOC member institutions, however, the exact number of institutions vary from year to year due to the addition of new member institutions, or the removal of previously accredited institutions. Table 2 provides a breakdown of the total number of institutions by state for the 2011-2012 year.

Table 2

*Number of Accredited Institutions by State 2011-2012*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>State</th>
<th>Number</th>
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<td>Alabama</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Florida</td>
<td>77</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Georgia</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kentucky</td>
<td>51</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Louisiana</td>
<td>38</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mississippi</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Carolina</td>
<td>112</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Carolina</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Tennessee</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Texas</td>
<td>162</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Virginia</td>
<td>72</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other-International</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Total</strong></td>
<td><strong>802</strong></td>
</tr>
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</table>

*Note.* Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (2013).

*SACSCOC Member, Candidate, Applicant List.* Atlanta: SACSCOC.
According to the SACSCOC Resource Manual for The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (2012), institutional effectiveness is “the systematic, explicit, and documented process of measuring institutional performance against mission in all aspects of an institution” (p. 16). When examining institutional effectiveness (IE) and/or assessment of student learning, two important components emerge to forefront, accountability and improvement (Aper, Culver, & Hinkle, 1990; Frye, 1999; Alexander, 2000; Suskie, 2009; Ewell, 2011). Higher education institutions are accountable to all stakeholders, including students, parents, accrediting agencies, government agencies, and other funding sources. To substantiate accountability, the institution must validate that their stated intentions are aligned with actual or current conditions. Similarly, continuous improvement upon the programs and services provided to enhance student outcomes must also be evidenced. Accountability and levels of improvement (overall effectiveness) are both demonstrated through ongoing integrated assessment of programs, services, and student learning among other things.

Evidencing student learning is a major component in demonstrating overall institutional effectiveness (Suskie, 2009; Ewell, 2001). SACSCOC supports this premise through its requirements for each member institution to clearly identify student learning outcomes and specific indicators of student achievement; in addition, each institution is expected to provide evidence-based documentation to support these assertions. The SACSCOC standards related to institutional effectiveness and student learning and achievement include Core Requirement 2.5, Comprehensive Standards 3.3.1.1 and 3.5.1, and Federal Standard 4.1. The following is an outline of each standard.
**Core Requirement 2.5** - The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (a) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (b) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (c) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission (**Institutional Effectiveness**) (SACSCOC, 2012b, p. 18).

**Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1** - The institution identifies expected outcomes, assesses the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvement based on analysis of the results in each of the following areas:

**(Institutional Effectiveness)**

**3.3.1.1 Educational programs, to include student learning outcomes**

(SACSCOC, 2012b, p. 25)

**Comprehensive Standard 3.5.1** - The institution identifies college-level general education competencies and the extent to which students have attained them (**General Education Competencies**) (SACSCOC, 2012b, p. 29).

**Federal Requirement 4.1** - The institution evaluate success with respect to student achievement consistent with its mission. Criteria may include: enrollment data; retention, graduation, course completion, and job placement rates; state licensing examinations; student portfolios; or other means of demonstrating achievement of goals (**Student Achievement**) (SACSCOC, 2012b, p. 39).

As noted above, SACSCOC standards include Core Requirements (CR) which are considered the “basic, broad-based, fundamental requirements that an institution must meet to be accredited with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.
Commission on Colleges” (SACSCOC, 2012a, p. 11). They also include Comprehensive Standards (CS) which, as defined by SACSCOC, are standards that “are specific to the operations of an institution, represent good practice in higher education, and establish a level of accomplishment expected of all member institutions” (SACSCOC, 2012a, p. 35). Additionally, SACSCOC serves as a medium through which the Federal government monitors institutions. SACSCOC aids the U.S. Department of Education by establishing the eligibility of its institutions to participate in programs authorized under Title IV (Federal Financial Aid) of the Higher Education Act of 1965 as amended, and other Federal programs, through valuation of its Federal Requirements (FR) (SACSCOC, 2012a, p. 91). Each institution is required to document compliance with the Federal requirements monitored by SACSCOC.

While this study focuses on CS 3.3.1.1, which examines institutional effectiveness through educational programs and student learning outcomes, it is important to understand how this standard relates to the other standards mentioned above. Core Requirement (CR) 2.5 (Institutional Effectiveness) can be viewed as an explanation of the institution’s process for systematically assessing its effectiveness on an on-going institution-wide level. Comprehensive Standards (CS) 3.3.1.1 and 3.5.1 emphasize the effectiveness of Educational Programs/Student Outcomes and General Education Competencies respectively, and can be viewed as practice or application of the systemic effectiveness process described in CR 2.5, inclusive of documentation of the results and use of results for continuous improvements. Federal Requirement (FR) 4.1 (Student Achievement) focuses on the institution’s documentation of its success as it relates to
student achievement, or the outputs of the education process, such as retention, graduation, and placement rates. Figure 2 provides a visual illustration of these standards.

Figure 2. Standards for Institutional Effectiveness, Student Learning, and Achievement

It is also important to note that each of these standards is interrelated, and according to SACSCOC, acts as a cross-reference for one or more of the other standards (SACSCOC, 2012a). Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1, for example, acts as a cross-reference for CR 2.5, CS 3.5.1, and FR 4.1. As indicated in Figure 3, resulting data from the assessment of these standards (as well as others) should guide the institutions in developing a Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP).
According to the principles, the QEP includes “an institutional process for identifying key issues emerging from institutional assessment and focuses on learning outcomes and/or the environment supporting student learning and accomplishing the mission of the institution” (SACSCOC, 2012b, p. 21). In other words, the QEP further promotes levels of effectiveness within the institution and supports the institution’s continuous improvement cycle.

**Statement of the Problem**

A number of southern higher education institutions accredited by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges are failing to adequately demonstrate their levels of effectiveness directly related to the assessment of their academic programs and student learning. SACSCOC assesses institutional effectiveness
in this expanse through Comprehensive Standard (CS) 3.3.1.1. Unfortunately, there have been a consistent number of institutions failing to comply with this standard in recent years. More specifically, these institutions failed to adequately document their ability to do one of the following: (a) identify expected learning outcomes, (b) assess achievement of the intended learning outcome, and/or (c) provide evidence of improvement in the area of educational programs and student learning based on the assessment results.

According to data provided by SACSCOC (Cuevas & Matveev, 2013), the numbers of institutions that are found noncompliant with this standard are commonly above 60% after the off-site review. The data show that this number usually decreases to about 40% after the on-site review and between 20% and 30% by the end of the compliance and report (C & R) review. Generally, institutions that fail to meet the requirement(s) of SACSCOC Principal of Accreditation standard(s) (Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements) are labeled as noncompliant, and are sanctioned accordingly. The specific actions taken against the institution, which may include warnings, monitoring, probation and removal from membership among other things, depends on the individual standard(s) and the gravity of the institution’s noncompliance with the standard(s).

In a 2006 report, SACSCOC noted that Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1 (Institutional Effectiveness) was one of six standards where at least 50% of the institutions reviewed were cited for noncompliance during the off-site review (SACSCOC, 2006). According to the report, of the 156 institutions reviewed for reaffirmation, 62% were cited for noncompliance with CS 3.3.1.1 during the off-site
review. More recent data show the same trend. During the 2009 SACSCOC reaffirmation of accreditation review, 64% of the institutions were found noncompliant with CS 3.3.1.1 after the institutions’ off-site reviews, 45% were found noncompliant after the on-site reviews, and 30% of the institutions were found noncompliant after the C & R reviews (Cuevas & Matveev, 2013). Similarly, during the 2010 SACSCOC reaffirmation of accreditation review, 67% of the institutions were found noncompliant with CS 3.3.1.1 after the agency’s off-site reviews, and 40% and 20% of the institutions were found non-compliant after the on-site and C & R review, respectively (Cuevas & Matveev, 2013). This trend continued in 2011 and 2012. In 2011 and 2012, 65% and 66%, respectively, of the institutions reviewed for reaffirmation were cited for noncompliance with CS 3.3.1.1 during the off-site review. During the off-site review, 41% and 45% of the institutions were cited as noncompliant with 3.3.1.1 in 2011 and 2012, respectively. The C & R review results were 26% and 28% for 2011 and 2012, respectively (Cuevas & Matveev, 2013).

These numbers verify two things. First, that this standard is a challenge for the majority of the institutions across the region. Secondly, the fact that the exceptionally high number of non-compliant institutions with CS 3.3.1.1 after an off-site review drops considerably by the on-site review, and by nearly 40% after the C & R review, supports the premise that these institutions are ineffective in documenting their levels of effectiveness associated with student learning.
Purpose of the Study

This study sought to understand the interaction among several internal variables within selected institutions, to determine how they impact the institutions’ ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness (IE) by evidencing student learning. The researcher focused on student learning because it is a fundamental component in demonstrating mission accomplishment and IE in higher education. Ewell (2001) acknowledges the importance of student learning on institutional effectiveness, stating, “Student learning outcomes are rapidly taking center stage as the principal gauge of higher education’s effectiveness” (p.1). Suskie (2009) also noted that a major component in assessing institutional effectiveness is assessing student learning as student learning is at the heart of each institution’s mission. Figure 4 illustrates the relationship of student learning to institutional effectiveness as described by Suskie.

![Figure 4. Suskie’s (2009) Model of Student Learning and Institutional Effectiveness](image-url)
Seven institutions were selected to participate in this study. To determine the extent to which the selected institutions’ environments impacted their ability to effectively engage in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process for the purpose of evidencing institutional effectiveness, and overall student learning. Data collected via an electronic survey and telephone interview with key personnel at each institution were analyzed. In addition, a comparative analysis of each institutions’ SACSCOC decennial reaffirmation of accreditation report/ten year review response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1, and any further response reports submitted was conducted. The researcher also examined commonalities among the internal variables between the selected institutions. The findings were used to identify internal structural components and best practices for documenting IE and student learning that can be universally applied to all institutions seeking regional accreditation, or reaffirmation of accreditation through SACSCOC.

**Research Questions**

The research questions developed for this study are intended to examine the internal factors in each institution that can impact their ability to evidence effectiveness in response to SACSCOC Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1. The following are questions developed based on the identified independent variables to guide this study in accordance with its purpose.

**RQ1:** How is institutional effectiveness impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders?
RQ2: How do the institution’s planning, assessment, and research departments’ structures impact institutional effectiveness?

RQ3: How does the allocation of human fiscal and physical resources impact the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness?

RQ4: What role does the culture of the institution play in its ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness?

RQ5: How do the institution’s planning and assessment processes impact overall institutional effectiveness?

RQ6: What role does technology play in the institution’s ability to demonstrate that it engages in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process?

RQ7: How does the institution’s accreditation preparation period impact its overall effectiveness?

**Significance of the Study**

Studies on institutional effectiveness have taken a number of forms. Researchers and scholars have looked at defining effectiveness or what it means to be effective (Cameron, 1978; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Erisman, 2009 Middaugh, 2010; Manning, 2011), how effectiveness is measured or demonstrated (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Erisman, 2009; Sukie, 2009; Middaugh, 2010; Cameron, 1978; Manning, 2011; Head & Johnson, 2011; Alfred, 2011), how it impacts the institution (Erisman, 2009; Middaugh, 2010), and how it has evolved (Head, 2011; Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Aper, Culver, & Hinkle, 1990; Alexander, 2000; Alfred 2011). Studies have also looked the relationship between
institutional effectiveness and student learning assessment (Frye, 1999; Erisman, 2009), as well as accreditation and student learning outcomes (Ewell, 2001; Head, 2011; Head & Johnson, 2011). While this study looks at institutional effectiveness based on student learning in higher education, it also examines the correlation between IE based on student learning and the accreditation standard set by a regional accrediting agency.

The focus of this study is on the internal factors of higher education institutions that impact their ability to demonstrate or evidence the institution’s levels of effectiveness. It not only adds to the existing body of literature on institutional effectiveness and evidencing student learning in higher education, but it also attempts to fill the gaps in the literature on IE and the higher education environment, as well as the role that national recognition (attained through regional accreditation) plays in this process.

In seeking regional accreditation with SACSCOC, all institutions are provided identical guidelines and rationale for each required standard; however, it is up to each individual institution to prove that their programs and services, as well as their policies and procedures, are aligned with the institution’s mission, and that they are effective. Carter, Johnson, and Gibbs (2007) concluded that the main reason for noncompliance decisions by the off-site committees in 2007 was lack of complete documentation and supporting information during the 2007 SACS Commission on Colleges Annual Meeting. Through an in-depth review of seven institutions, this research examines specific aspects of the internal environment of these institutions to determine how they impact the institution’s levels of effectiveness, and their ability to implement efficacious strategies in
documenting IE, student learning and overall student achievement in response to accreditation requirements.

This study is developed to assist institutions in improving the way they structure their internal environment and evidence institutional effectiveness. Higher education presidents, provosts, deans, institutional researchers, and planning and assessment personnel, within and across institutions can utilize the information provided to develop viable solutions to problems related to institutional effectiveness before outside agencies intervene. This study also provides recommendations to help institutions develop effective internal policies and procedures to guide future decision making with planning, assessment, and the utilization of the data gathered to aid in institutional improvements.

While this study is built around the institutions’ compliance with SACSCOC standard for institutional effectiveness and student learning (CS 3.3.1.1), it is important to note the far reaching impact of regional accreditation. Institutions that fail to correct deficiencies of significant noncompliance with Core Requirements, Comprehensive Standards, and Federal Requirements of the Principles of Accreditation of the Commission can lose their accreditation or membership with SACSCOC; however, the drawbacks extend beyond their standing with SACSCOC.

First, any Title IV institution that loses its regional accreditation will also lose federal funding support. Title IV institutions are higher education institutions approved to participate in the Federal Student Financial Assistance (SFA) Programs authorized by Title IV of the Higher Education Act of 1965, as amended (HEA). To obtain funding from the U.S. Department of Education under Title IV, an institution must meet a number
of criteria including accreditation by a nationally recognized accrediting agency such as SACSCOC (U.S. Department of Education, 2013). In other words, a non-accredited institution cannot participate in the Federal Student Financial Assistance (FSA) Programs, which include work-study programs, federal grants to students, and family education loans, and other direct loan programs. With the current economic climate and increases in college tuition, today’s college students are becoming increasingly dependent on Federal financial assistance. According to the National Center for Education Statistics, at least 81.3% of the students in all of the Higher Education institutions in the United States received some form of financial aid in 2009-2010. That number increased to 82.3% in 2010-2011 (Digest of Education Statistics, 2012).

Secondly, standards monitored by SACSCOC are often closely aligned with standards of other national and professional program accrediting agencies as well. Therefore, member institutions that fail to comply with the standards outlined in the SACSCOC Principles of Accreditation are also likely to be out of compliance with standards of other professional accrediting agencies for academic programs and schools, and state education boards. This can result in loss of program and/or school accreditations as well. Like regional accreditation, accreditation of a program and/or school indicates a commitment to quality. It also identifies the program and/or school as an equal in the higher education arena with competitive academic programs.

Furthermore, loss of accreditation can jeopardize the institution’s credibility and reputation among all stakeholders. It can negatively impact the overall perception of the institution by peer institutions, employers, investors, parents and students. It can be
deleterious to students’ ability to successfully attain employment or continued education once a degree is earned. Similarly, loss of accreditation can impact the way institutions are viewed and valued by other public and private agencies such as foundations and corporations, resulting in additional loss of funding support including philanthropic donations, endowments, and grants and contracts.

**Summary**

Chapter I is comprised of the study’s purpose, significance, and the research questions developed to guide this study. This chapter provides an introduction to institutional effectiveness and accreditation in the United States. In addition, chapter one highlights the far-reaching impact of regional accreditation in the higher education arena.
CHAPTER II
REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Organization of the Review

Chapter II is intended to review relevant literature on the dependent variable, institutional effectiveness, as well as specific independent variables of this study. First, literature on the history of higher education accreditation in the United States, SACS Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), and the SACSCOC Reaffirmation of Accreditation process are presented. Secondly, literature on assessment of student learning, and student learning and institutional effectiveness in higher education are reviewed. Finally, studies on organizational leadership, cultures, and change within the context of higher education are also examined in this chapter.

Emergent Themes

Higher Education Accreditation in the United States

In the United States, higher education institutions are not accredited by the U.S. Department of Education. Instead of a Federal Ministry of Education, or any centralized government regulatory system, accreditation in higher education is regulated by six regional accrediting agencies (Middaugh, 2010). Eaton (2012) describes the higher education accreditation as a decentralized and complex nongovernmental enterprise that mirrors “the decentralization and complexity of American higher education. The six
private, non-profit accrediting agencies include the Middle States Association of Colleges and Schools - Middle States Commission on Higher Education (MSCHE), New England Association of Schools and Colleges - Commission on Institutions of Higher Education (NEASC-CIHE), North Central Association of Colleges and Schools - The Higher Learning Commission (NCA-HLC), Northwest Commission on Colleges and Universities (NWCCU), Southern Association of Colleges and Schools - Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC), and Western Association of Schools and Colleges - Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (WASC-ACCJC), and Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC-ACSCU). Each of the accrediting agencies has its own establish standards to ensure that the education provided by higher education institutions within their regions meet acceptable levels of quality. In addition, each agency has established quality criteria and procedures for evaluating the institutions within their regions. Determination of which institution is accredited by these six agencies is dependent upon the geographic location of the institution.

Accreditation is a voluntary process that allows member colleges and universities to engage in self-regulatory peer evaluations to determine their levels of compliance and/or quality. Higher education institutions created the accreditation process as a means of assessing academic quality and establishing inter-institutional quality. According to the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA), accreditation is a review of the quality of higher education institutions and programs and a major way that students, families, government officials, and the press know that an institution or program provides a quality education (CHEA, 2013). While these institutions are required to maintain
certain standards, enhance the quality of their educational programs, and demonstrate
their levels of effectiveness in accordance with their stated mission, they are permitted to
operate with considerable autonomy. According to Middaugh (2010), this process is
envied by other international colleges and universities who are burdened by overly
prescriptive government regulations that do little to enhance student learning, and other
institutional outcomes.

In reviewing some of the historical events that led to today’s higher education
accreditation system, Middaugh (2010) discussed the impact of a number of
environmental changes in the 1980s. This included the economic recession in the early
1980s, which he stated forced the federal and state governments to reevaluate the levels
of support for higher education institutions. Middaugh further asserts that as priorities for
federal and state governments shifted to issues of rising healthcare cost, underperforming
public elementary and secondary schools, deteriorating infrastructures of highways and
bridges, and public safety issues, so did the governments allocation of funds. The author
goes on to explain that as public funding declined, college tuition levels increased, and
parents began to question the amount of money they were investing in a college
education.

Middaugh also discussed the many criticisms of higher education in United States
through a review of literature by scholars in the 1990s such as Robert Zemsky and
William Massey, and Ernest Boyer. According to Middaugh (2010), Zemsky and
Massey questioned the return on investment from a college degree in their research, and
Boyer questioned the quality of the education students received. The author summarizes the critique of higher education at that time stating:

American colleges and universities depicted as fundamentally mismanaged, economically inefficient institutions charging dramatically escalating tuition rates for educational product that was not demonstrably worth the price. Sadly, most colleges and universities lacked the qualitative and quantitative analytical evidence of institutional effectiveness that would enable them to blunt this criticism. (p. 6)

Similar to Middaugh, Ewell (2001) also references events of the 1980s as a driving force behind the accreditation process as we know it today. Ewell asserts that as the stakeholders, including parents, employers, and the Department of Education, demanded more accountability, and assurance of learning from higher education institutions, accrediting agencies responded.

Today, accreditation provides information on the quality and integrity of the institution. It can also provide stakeholders, such as parents and students, an idea of the return they can expect from their investment. Eaton (2012) notes that the roles of accreditation are ensuring quality to students and the public, gaining access to federal and state funds, engendering private sector confidence in hiring potential employees, funding further education for current employees, and decisions about private funding, and easing the transfer of courses and programs among colleges and universities. The U.S. Department of Education (2013) specifies the following as some of the functions of accreditation:
1. Verifying that an institution or program meets established standards;
2. Assisting prospective students in identifying acceptable institutions;
3. Assisting institutions in determining the acceptability of transfer credits;
4. Helping to identify institutions and programs for the investment of public and private funds;
5. Protecting an institution against harmful internal and external pressure;
6. Creating goals for self-improvement of weaker programs and stimulating a general raising of standards among educational institutions;
7. Involving the faculty and staff comprehensively in institutional evaluation and planning;
8. Establishing criteria for professional certification and licensure and for upgrading courses offering such preparation; and
9. Providing one of several considerations used as a basis for determining eligibility for Federal assistance. (p. 2)

Similarly, in his study on the need for accreditation reform, Dickeson (2006) classified the purposes behind accreditation in the United States into two groups: institutional purposes and public purposes. Under institutional purposes, Dickeson noted the following:

1. self-improvement
2. to advance academic quality,
3. to guide planning and budgeting decisions, and
4. as a medium of inter-institutional exchange (acceptance of credits earned from
other accredited institutions. (p. 2)

Public purposes were listed as

1. consumer protection
2. honoring public interest with respect to public investment
3. public right to know about quality, and
4. to maintain consistent, clear, and coherent communication with all
   stakeholders (students, potential students, parents, donors, employers) about
   the results of the education provided and the value of the institutional product.
   (p. 3)

Dickeson asserted that any analyses of accreditation will show that, rather than public
purposes, the institutional purposes predominate.

The accreditation process is a very detailed and involved process that is divided in
a various phases. Table 3 provides an overview of the accreditation procedures as
described by the U.S. Department of Education.

Eaton (2012) asserts that accreditation is considered a reliable authority on
academic quality by both federal and state government. She describes the process as “a
trust-based, standards-based, evidence-based, judgment-based, peer-based process”
(p. 1). While higher education institutions are held accountable by accrediting agencies
through the peer-review process, the accreditors themselves also undergo a review
process by one of two external bodies (Eaton, 2012).
Table 3

*The Accreditation Procedure*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Standards</td>
<td>The accrediting agency, in collaboration with educational institutions, establishes standards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-study</td>
<td>The institution or program seeking accreditation prepares an in-depth self-evaluation study that measures its performance against the standards established by the accrediting agency.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On-site Evaluation</td>
<td>A team selected by the accrediting agency visits the institution or program to determine first-hand if the applicant meets the established standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Publication</td>
<td>Upon being satisfied that the applicant meets its standards, the accrediting agency grants accreditation or preaccreditation status and lists the institution or program in an official publication with other similarly accredited or preaccredited institutions or programs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Monitoring</td>
<td>The accrediting agency monitors each accredited institution or program throughout the period of accreditation granted to verify that it continues to meet the agency's standards.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reevaluation</td>
<td>The accrediting agency periodically reevaluates each institution or program that it lists to ascertain whether continuation of its accredited or preaccredited status is warranted.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The first external body is the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA). CHEA is a private, nonprofit organization that serves as the national coordinating agency for institutional and programmatic accreditation activity in the United States. CHEA serves to strengthen the accreditation process in the United States carried out by regional, faith-related, career-related and programmatic accreditors. With over 3000 members, CHEA is considered the “largest institutional higher education membership organization in the United States” (Council for Higher Education Accreditation, 2012, p. 1). The second external body that reviews accrediting agencies is the United States Department of Education (USDE). The periodic external review conducted on accreditors by these external bodies is known as “recognition” (Eaton, 2012).

**SACS Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) and Regional Accreditation**

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) is a private, nonprofit voluntary organization. Founded in 1895, SACS is comprised of the Council on Accreditation and School Improvement (CASI) and the Commission on Colleges (COC). The five primary functional units of SACSCOC include the College Delegate Assembly (1 member from each of the 800 plus institutions), the Appeals Committee (12 members), the Board of Trustees (77 elected members), the Executive Council (13 trustees), and the Committees on Compliance and Reports (64 trustees) (SACSCOC, 2011).

SACS Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is charged by the U.S. Department of Education with carrying out the accreditation process for higher education institutions that award associate, baccalaureate, master’s or doctoral degrees in the southern region
(SACSCOC, 2011). The southern region includes Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, and Virginia (see Figure 5), and Latin America. Figure 5 provides a visual illustration of the 11 states that make-up the Southern Region.

![Southern Region Accredited by SACSCOC](http://sacscoc.org/)

*Figure 5. Southern Region Accredited by SACSCOC. Adopted from Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. (2012. Retrieved from Commission Colleges: http://sacscoc.org/)*

In July of 2013, SACSCOC reported that the southern region consisted of 802 degree granting institutions—480 public institutions, 307 Private Not-For-Profit, and 15 Private For-Profit institutions (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2013). All member institutions are classified according to the highest degree offered.
Table 4 provides an overview of the current 802 member institutions of SACS Commission on Colleges broken down by the six levels of classification. As noted in the table, institutions are assigned to each level depending on the highest degree offered at the institution, and in some instances, the quantity of the highest degree offered.

Table 4

\textit{SACSCOC Institutions by Level}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Level</th>
<th>Description</th>
<th>Members</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Level I</td>
<td>Associate degree</td>
<td>274</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level II</td>
<td>Baccalaureate degree</td>
<td>119</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level III</td>
<td>Master’s degree</td>
<td>144</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level IV</td>
<td>Master’s degree and Education Specialist</td>
<td>23</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level V</td>
<td>Three or fewer doctoral degrees</td>
<td>138</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Level VI</td>
<td>Four or more doctoral degrees</td>
<td>104</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td></td>
<td>802</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

\textit{Note:} Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. (2013). \textit{SACSCOC Member, Candidate, Applicant List}, Atlanta: SACSCOC.

The Commission affirms that accreditation is “both a process and a product” noting that the product of accreditation is “a public statement of an institution’s continuing capacity to provide effective programs and services based on agreed-upon requirements” (SACSCOC, 2012b p. 2). SACS notes that the focus or mission of the Commission on Colleges (Commission) is “the enhancement of educational quality throughout the region and the improvement of the effectiveness of institutions by
ensuring that they meet standards established by the higher education community that address the needs of society and students” (SACSCOC, 2012b, p. 1).

As part of its philosophy, the Commission requires each institution to engage continually in activities that enhance/improve their programs and services, and demonstrate the accomplishment of their stated mission (SACSCOC, 2012b). Institutions that effectively evidence this are accredited and/or reaccredited by SACSCOC. SACS Commission on Colleges has identified 11 “fundamental characteristics of accreditation” to which it adheres:

1. Participation in the accreditation process is voluntary and is an earned and renewable status.

2. Member institutions develop, amend, and approve accreditation requirements.

3. The process of accreditation is representative, responsive, and appropriate to the types of institutions accredited.

4. Accreditation is a form of self-regulation.

5. Accreditation requires institutional commitment and engagement.

6. Accreditation is based upon a peer review process.

7. Accreditation requires an institutional commitment to student learning and achievement.

8. Accreditation acknowledges an institution’s prerogative to articulate its mission, including a religious mission, within the recognized context of
higher education and its responsibility to show that it is accomplishing its mission.

9. Accreditation requires institutional commitment to the concept of quality enhancement through continuous assessment and improvement.

10. Accreditation expects an institution to develop a balanced governing structure designed to promote institutional integrity, autonomy, and flexibility of operation.

11. Accreditation expects an institution to ensure that its programs are complemented by support structures and resources that allow for the total growth and development of its students. (SACSCOC, 2012b, p. 3)

The Commission outlines its requirements for accreditation for all degree-granting institutions in the Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement (Principles). The Principles, which were first introduced in 2001, replaced the Criteria for Accreditation, and went into full implementation in 2005 (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges, 2006). Along with the Principles, SACSCOC also introduced a new peer review process. Both the Principles and the peer review were intended to substantiate the Commission’s intent to engage in a partnership with its member institutions.

As outlined in the Principles, institutions are accredited by SACSCOC based on their compliance with the Principle of Integrity (PR) – Section 1, Core Requirements (CR) – Section 2, Comprehensive Standards (CS) – Section 3, Federal Requirements (FR) – Section 4, and with the policies/procedures of the SACS Commission on Colleges.
SACSCOC affirms that accreditation serves as a public statement that attests to the institution’s ability to provide effective program and services (SACSCOC, 2012b). The agency also asserts that when an institution is accredited by the Commission it signifies that the institution,

1. has a mission appropriate to higher education
2. has resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish and sustain that mission and
3. maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers, and that indicate whether it is successful in achieving its stated objectives. (SACSCOC, 2012b, p. 1)

**SACSCOC Reaffirmation of Accreditation Process**

The reaffirmation of accreditation is a ten-year/decennial review process to ensure that member institutions “maintain continuing compliance with Commission policies and with The Principles of Accreditation” (SACSCOC, 2011, p. 8). In other words, this process allows each institution to prove that they upheld the requirements and standards for accreditation that have been established and agreed upon by peer member institutions, and attest to the quality of the institution. There are five documents that are critical to reaffirmation of the accreditation process. These five documents are described in details below

1. A **Certification of Compliance Report (CCR)** documenting the institution’s full compliance with the SACS Core Requirements (except 2.12),
Comprehensive Standards (except 3.3.2), and Federal Requirements. The CCR is reviewed by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

2. The **Institutional Summary Form** documenting all educational programs and degrees offered, identification of governance control, a brief history and institutional characteristics, a list of off-campus sites and distance learning modalities, accreditation status with other agencies, and the institution’s relationship with the U.S. Department of Education. This document is completed with the Compliance Certification and is forwarded to the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee.

3. A **Quality Enhancement Plan (QEP)** report focusing on improving some aspect of the educational component of the institution that enhances the quality of student learning. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee, who visit the institution, inspect the report, interview a number of campus constituents, evaluate and discuss the QEP, and review publications and other evidence documents and records.

4. **Focused Report** is an optional report that most institutions prepare for the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee to provide updated or additional documentation in response to a judgment by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee regarding requirements or standards with which the committee found the institution to be in noncompliance or which the committee did not review.
5. **Institutional Profiles** are submitted annually to the Commission to provide updates of general institutional information, financial information, and enrollment data. This information is maintained by the Commission and is made available to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee to use in identifying financial and enrollment trends and other indicators of institutional stability.

(SACSCOC, 2011, p. 11)

The reaffirmation process involves nine steps that are divided into four phases. During Phase I, the institutions participate in an orientation meeting with the Commission staff, and may also choose to have follow-up advisory visit by a Commission staff representative. The Compliance Certification and all other relevant supporting documentation are submitted to the Commission staff and to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee during phase II. The on-site review is conducted in Phase III, and in Phase IV, the Board of Trustees Review is conducted. The SACSCOC Board of Trustees makes the final determination of an institution’s compliance with the accreditation requirements, and takes action against the institution.

SACSCOC reviews approximately 80 institutions annually, and schedules the reviews based on their assigned Tracks (SACSCOC, 2011). Track A, which includes institutions that offer undergraduate degrees (Institutions classified as Level I-II), is scheduled for Commission action on reaffirmation in June. Track B, which includes institutions that offer both undergraduate and graduate degrees or institutions that offer only graduate degrees (Institutions classified as Level III-VI), is scheduled for
Commission action on reaffirmation in December. The complete reaffirmation process is outlined in Table 5.

Table 5

*The SACS Commission on Colleges Reaffirmation Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Phase 1: Preparation</td>
<td>1. The Orientation Meeting</td>
<td>Commission staff conduct an Orientation Meeting for the institution’s Leadership Team to review critical issues pertaining to the completion of the Compliance Certification and the development of the Quality Enhancement Plan.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Advisory Visit</td>
<td>The institution’s assigned Commission staff representative may conduct an optional advisory visit as a follow up to the Orientation Meeting. This consultation may take the form of a telephone conference call, videoconference, or in-person.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 2: Off-Site Review</td>
<td>3. Compliance Certification</td>
<td>The institution prepares and submits its Compliance Certification, relevant supporting documentation, and an updated “Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews” to Commission staff and to the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee.</td>
</tr>
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<td></td>
<td>4. Off-Site Review and Report</td>
<td>The Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee remotely reviews the institution’s Compliance Certification and then meets to finalize the report of its findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Review of the Report</td>
<td>Commission staff transmits the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee report to the institution and invite the Leadership Team to schedule a telephone conference call or videoconference with them to discuss the findings.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phase 3: On-Site Review</td>
<td>Phase</td>
<td>Steps</td>
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<tr>
<td>6. Materials for the Committee</td>
<td>The Commission sends the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee a copy of the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee’s report. The institution submits its updated Institutional Summary Form Prepared for Commission Reviews, Compliance Certification (narratives only), catalog(s), written response to Third Party comment (if applicable), Quality Enhancement Plan, and Focused Report (if one is prepared) to the Commission and to the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee members.</td>
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<tr>
<td>7. On-Site Visit and Report</td>
<td>The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee visits the institution, including a selection of off-campus sites, if applicable, to evaluate and determine the acceptability of the QEP, to review areas of noncompliance noted by the Off-Site Reaffirmation Committee, to review standards and requirements related to the criteria established by the U.S. Department of Education, and to review any areas of concern that may surface during the visit. The On-Site Reaffirmation Committee completes the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee, which is submitted to the Commission. The institution’s Commission staff representative transmits the Committee’s final report to the institution.</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase 4: Board of Trustee Review</th>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8. Response to the Visiting Committee Report</td>
<td>The institution prepares a response to the recommendations in the Report of the Reaffirmation Committee, if any, and submits it to the Commission along with a copy of the QEP. The Commission staff representative sends a copy of the response to the Chair of the On-Site Reaffirmation Committee for evaluation.</td>
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Table 5 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Phase</th>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9. Board of Trustees Action</td>
<td>After review of the three primary reaffirmation documents --</td>
<td>Report of the Reaffirmation Committee, the QEP, and the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>institution’s response – and two analyses of the institution’s</td>
<td>response, one by Chair of the On-Site Reaffirmation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>response, one by Chair of the On-Site Reaffirmation</td>
<td>Committee and one by the institution’s Commission staff representative, the SACSCOC Board of Trustees takes action</td>
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<td></td>
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<td>on the institution’s reaffirmation.</td>
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Retrieved from www.sacscoc.org

In summary, the reaffirmation of accreditation process is designed to affirm the institutions are committed to quality enhancement and continuous improvements, and focused on enhancing student learning and institutional effectiveness. This process allows institutions to determine whether the stated mission accurately reflects the values, aspirations, and commitments of the institution, as well as whether the programs and services provided reflect its mission according to SACSCOC. SACSCOC also asserts that this process affords institutions the opportunity to demonstrate its accountability to constituents and the public (SACSCOC, 2011).

Assessment of Student Learning in Higher Education

Assessment in higher education is a growing phenomenon. With the increasing demands for both private and public higher education institutions around the nation to
prove performances and goal attainment, there has been an influx of books and articles on
the subject of assessment. Accompanying the growth of this phenomenon is its many
definitions and applications. Heyward (2000) defines assessment as “a multidimensional
process for judging individuals and institutions in action” (p. 13). He argued that higher
education assessment is applied to student learning on one end, and on the other, it is
applied to the institutions, programs, and teaching. Heywood (2000) also notes that
regardless of what we are assessing, the process is the same; the purposes is declared and
open to evaluation, the methods for achieving the purpose are known and the assessment
techniques used are valid and reliable. Thomas A. Angelo (1995), former director of the
American Association for Higher Education (AAHE), defined assessment in higher
education as such:

Assessment is an ongoing process aimed at understanding and improving student
learning. It involves making our expectations explicit and public; setting
appropriate criteria and high standards for learning quality; systematically
gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to determine how well
performance matches those expectations and standards; and using the resulting
information to document, explain, and improve performance. When it is
embedded effectively within larger institutional systems, assessment can help us
focus our collective attention, examine our assumptions, and create a shared
academic culture dedicated to assuring and improving the quality of higher
education. (p. 7)
The American Association for higher Education (AAHE) developed nine Principles of Good Practices for Assessing Student Learning:

1. The assessment of student learning begins with educational values.
2. Assessment is most effective when it reflects an understanding of learning as multidimensional, integrated, and revealed in performance over time.
3. Assessment works best when the programs it seeks to improve have clear, explicitly stated purposes.
4. Assessment requires attention to outcomes but also, and equally to the experiences that lead to those outcomes.
5. Assessment works best when it is ongoing, not episodic.
6. Assessment fosters wider improvement when representatives from across the educational community are involved.
7. Assessment makes a difference when it begins with issues of use and illuminates questions that people really care about.
8. Assessment is most likely to lead to improvement when it is part of a larger set of conditions that promote change.
9. Through assessment, educators meet responsibilities to students and to the public. (Astin, Banta, Cross, El-Khawas, Ewell, Hutchings et al., 1992, pp. 2-3)

Astin (1993) also developed two premises about higher education assessment in his book, Assessment for Excellence, which he referred to as the “is” and “ought” of higher education assessment. The first is that “an institution’s assessment practices are a
reflection of its values.” The second premise is “assessment practices should further the aims and purposes of our higher education institutions” which he referred to as “education, research, and public or community service” (p. 3). In his definition of assessment, Astin asserted,

I shall consider assessment to include 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, but the basic motive for gathering it is to improve the functioning of the institution and its people. I used functioning to refer to the broad social purposes of a college or university: to facilitate student learning and development, to advance the frontiers of knowledge, and to contribute to the community, and the society. (p. 2)

Since higher education institutions are in the business of educating students, it is important that these institutions identify what students are expected to gain as a result of their matriculation. This is usually presented in the form of student learning outcomes (SLOs), thus the assessment of SLOs is one of the foremost means of determining if an institution is effective. Walvoord (2010) defines assessment of student learning as “the systematic collection of information about student learning using the time, knowledge, expertise, and resources available in order to inform decisions that affect student learning” (p. 2). Similarly, Suskie (2009) defines assessment of student learning as,

The ongoing process of establishing clear, measurable expected outcomes of student learning, ensuring that students have sufficient opportunities to achieve those outcomes, systematically gathering, analyzing, and interpreting evidence to
determine how well student learning matches our expectations, and using the resulting information to understand and improve student learning. (p. 4)

Looking at the many definitions of assessment and assessment of student learning, one can conclude that higher education assessment should be a continuous process that is used to inform decision-making, improve student learning, and prove an institution’s ability to carry out its mission. Assessment of student learning provides institutions the ability to examine assumptions and answer pertinent questions about student learning at multiple levels (course, program, and institutional). When institutions engage in assessment activities, Patel (2010) asserts that they look for answers to questions such as:

1. Are our students learning what we think are important?
2. Are they learning what they need to succeed in their field or profession?
3. Are we improving in our ability to help students learn?
4. Should our curriculum or teaching strategies be modified?
5. Are there other techniques or additional resources that would help our students learn more effectively? (N. Patel, personal communication, October 10, 2010)

Subsequently, answering these questions can provide proof that goals, objectives, and student learning outcomes set by the institution are attained, and if they are not, then institutional leaders can examine or identify why this is the case, and take actions to improve the state of the institution. Again, this practice is designed to guide the decision-making process and bring about needed improvements in the program/curriculum, faculty performance, and the learning process for students.
Student Learning Assessment and Institutional Effectiveness in Higher Education

The quality of education in American colleges and universities has been a topic of debate for decades. While higher education institutions in the United States are being charged to enroll and graduate more students as a means of improving our human capital, economic competitiveness, and enhancing the nation’s standard of living (National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, 2010), the demands for accountability and assurance of learning in these institutions continue to grow. In 2009, President Obama made clear the focus of education for the nation stating that, “America cannot lead in the 21st century unless we have the best educated, most competitive workforce in the world” (Obama, 2009, para. 4).

Stakeholders from the federal government and state policymakers to employers and parents are all holding institutions accountable for answering questions such as: What do students know? What are they able to do? Do they have the disposition necessary to be successful contributing citizens of an increasingly global society, and expanding workforce? Studies, such as those conducted by the American Institute for Research (AIR), show that far too many college grads are graduating without mastering the basic skills needed to compete in the workforce such as communication, problem solving, and critical thinking skills (Uhlfelder, 2006). Consequently, assessment of student learning as a determinant of institutional effectiveness has emerged to the forefront of the accreditation process (Aper, Cuver, & Hinkle, 1990; Ewell, 2010; Erisman, 2009).

Determining institutional effectiveness requires assessing student learning, which is a central to the institution’s mission, (Suskie, 2009; Ewell, 2001; Astin, 1968). In his
research, Astin (1968) directly ties institutional effectiveness or “excellence” to student learning and achievement. According to Suskie (2009), there are two major reasons for assessing student learning, improvement and accountability. Suskie (2009) asserts that assessing student learning can improve, and validate, the quality of teaching, learning, program and services within the institution. Although the significance of assessing student learning to determine institutional effectiveness is a widely accepted concept, it is sometimes a challenging undertaking for many institutions. Erisman (2009) identified some of these challenges, indicating that they range from “selecting relevant learning outcomes and appropriate assessment methods to overcoming stakeholder objections and identifying useful ways to report assessment findings” (p. 14).

In the late 1980s, mandates from the U.S. Department of Education (DOE) made it a requirement for accrediting agencies to examine student learning outcomes in determining institutional effectiveness. SACSCOC was considered a pioneer in this area, introducing the institutional effectiveness standard in 1986 (Ewell, 2011). Today, the SACSCOC Resource Manual for The Principles of Accreditation: Foundations for Quality Enhancement defines institutional effectiveness as “the systematic, explicit, and documented process of measuring institutional performance against mission in all aspects of an institution” (p. 16). Thus, SACSCOC requires institutions to look at several aspects of the institution in documenting institutional effectiveness including educational programs and student learning outcomes (3.3.1.1), administrative support services (3.3.1.2), academic and student support services (3.3.1.3), and if appropriate research within its mission (3.3.1.4), and community/public service within its mission, (3.3.1.5)
Other accrediting organizations such as the American Association of Collegiate Schools of Business (AACSB), and the Accreditation Board of Engineering Technologies (ABET), soon followed SACSCOC, and were also considered early proponents of evidencing student learning in establishing effectiveness within an institution (Ewell, 2001).

The six regional accrediting agencies responsible for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the United States have all identified specific standards to measure institutional effectiveness. Middaugh (2010) discussed the commonality of standards set by each regional accrediting agency in his text. He pointed out that each accrediting body places emphases in the institution's ability to evidence assessment of student learning in demonstrating overall institutional effectiveness, and the use of assessment result in the strategic planning process. Table 6, developed by Middaugh, provides an overview of the six regional accrediting agencies’ standards on assessment of student learning, assessment of institutional effectiveness, and strategic planning to highlight the commonalities among them.

In a study conducted by Provezis (2010) on regional accreditation and student learning outcomes, it was also concluded that the six regional accreditation organizations “have similar expectations with regard to assessing student learning” (p. 7). Provezis also found that the regional accrediting agencies shaped institutional assessment activities. Provezis noted the following findings:

1. Each of the seven regional accreditors appears to be following the guidelines set forth in the C – RACs Principles of Good Practices (2003).
Table 6

*Commonalities of Standards Across Regional Accrediting Agencies in the United States*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Accrediting Agency</th>
<th>Assessment of student Learning</th>
<th>Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness</th>
<th>Systematic Strategic Planning</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Middle States</td>
<td>Assessment of student learning demonstrates that an institution’s students have knowledge, skills, and competencies consistent with institutional goals, and that students at graduation have achieved appropriate higher education goals.</td>
<td>The institution has developed and implemented an assessment process that evaluates its overall effectiveness in achieving its mission and goals, and its compliance with accreditation standards.</td>
<td>An institution conducts ongoing planning and resource allocation based on its mission and goals,</td>
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<tr>
<td>Association of Colleges and Schools</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commission on Higher Education</td>
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<tr>
<td>New England Association of Colleges and Schools</td>
<td>The institution implements and supports a systematic and broad-based approach to the assessment of student learning focused on education improvement through understanding what and how students are and how students are learning to achieve their mission and goals, giving primary focus to the realization of its mission and purposes….</td>
<td>The institution regularly and systematically evaluates the achievement of its mission and goals, and its education improvement mission and goals,</td>
<td>The institution undertakes planning and evaluation appropriate to its needs to accomplish and improve its needs to accomplish and improve its needs to accomplish and improve to its needs to accomplish and improve</td>
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<tr>
<td>Commission on Institutions of Higher Education</td>
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</tr>
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<tr>
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<th>Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness</th>
<th>Systematic Strategic Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>learning through their academic program and, as appropriate, through experiences outside the classroom.</td>
<td>education objectives.</td>
<td>sufficient resources for its planning and evaluation efforts… The institution systematically collects and uses data necessary to support institutional improvement, with an emphasis on the academic program.</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>The organization provides evidence of the student learning and teaching effectiveness that demonstrates it is fulfilling its educational mission.</td>
<td>The organizations’ ongoing evaluation and assessment processes provide reliable evidence of institutional effectiveness that clearly informs strategies for continuous improvement.</td>
<td>The organization’s allocation of resources and its processes for evaluation and planning demonstrate its capacity to fulfill its mission, improve the quality of education, and respond to future challenges and opportunities.</td>
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Table 6 (continued)

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<tr>
<th>Accrediting Agency</th>
<th>Assessment of Student Learning</th>
<th>Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness</th>
<th>Systematic Strategic Planning</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>North Commission on Colleges and Universities</td>
<td>The institution offers collegiate level programs that culminate in identified student competencies and lead to degrees or certificates in recognized fields of study. The achievement and maintenance of high quality programs is the primary responsibility of an accredited institution; hence, the evaluation of educational programs and their continuous improvement is an ongoing responsibility.</td>
<td>The institution uses the results of its systematic evaluation activities and ongoing planning processes to influence resource allocation and to improve its instructional programs, institutional services, and activities… the institution uses information from its planning and evaluation processes to communicate evidence of institutional outcomes; (1) continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (2) result in demonstrating the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.</td>
<td>The institution engages in ongoing, integrated, and institution-wide research-based planning and evaluation processes that (1) incorporate a systematic review of institutional mission, goals, and outcomes; (2) result in continuing improvement in institutional quality; and (3) demonstrate the institution is effectively accomplishing its mission.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Western Association of Colleges and Schools</td>
<td>The institution’s student learning outcomes and expectations for student attainment are clearly stated.</td>
<td>The institution employs a deliberate set of quality assurance processes at each level.</td>
<td>The institution periodically engages in multiple constituencies, including faculty, in institutional public.</td>
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Table 6 (continued)

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Accrediting Agency</th>
<th>Assessment of student Learning</th>
<th>Assessment of Institutional Effectiveness</th>
<th>Systematic Strategic Planning</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Accrediting Commission of Senior Colleges and Universities</td>
<td>at the course, program, and as appropriate, institutional level. These outcomes and expectations are reflected in academic programs and policies; curriculum; advisement; library and information resources; and the wider learning environment… The institution demonstrates that is graduates consistently achieve its stated levels of attainment and ensure that its expectations for student learning are embedded in the standards faculty use to evaluate student work.</td>
<td>of institutional functioning, including new curriculum and program approval processes, periodic program review, ongoing evaluation, and ad data collection. These processes include assessing effectiveness, tracking results over time, using comparative data from external sources, and improving structures, processes, curricula, and pedagogy.</td>
<td>reflection and planning processes which assess its strategic position; articulate priorities; examine the alignment of its purposes, core functions and resources; and define the future direction of the institution. The Institution monitors the effectiveness of its plans and planning processes, and revises them as appropriate.</td>
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</table>

2. All regional accreditors expect learning outcomes to be defined, articulated, assessed, and use the guided institutional improvement.

3. None of the regional accreditors prescribe specific assessment practices or tools, but several provided structured guidance with regard to ways to assess student learning.

4. All regional accreditors appear to agree that public disclosure of learning outcomes assessment information is an issue of institutional integrity.

5. With one exception, regional accreditation standards urge that faculty be involved with learning outcomes assessment, particularly with respect to the creation of learning goals and of plans linking assessment to improvement.

6. Perhaps most relevant, each of the regional accreditors reported that deficiencies in student learning outcomes assessment were the most common shortcoming institutional evaluations.

7. Finally, through multiple avenues, all but one of the regional accreditors provided institutions with direct assistance (in the form off materials, programs, and other means) to improve their capacity to assess student learning outcomes. (p. 7)

With unremitting realization of the importance of assessing student learning in determining levels of effectiveness, accrediting agencies are closely monitoring how higher education institutions assess and evidence student learning outcomes in various areas including assessment in general education and academic programs. While institutions that fail to demonstrate these outcomes alone will not necessarily be denied
accreditation, accrediting agencies are imposing a number of sanctions/penalties on institutions that fail to comply with associated standards (Erisman, 2009). For example, in December 2008, SACS reviewed 44 institutions Fifth Year Interim Report, and 32 were required to submit a monitoring report for review in either June or December 2009. Of those 32 institutions, 18 (56%) were cited for standard 3.3.1.1 (Institutional Effectiveness: Educational Program) (SACSCOC, 2008).

Higher education institutions now understand that it would be impossible to prove they are effective if they are unable to demonstrate student learning. The next step, determining how best to do this, brings about a number of questions. What is the accrediting body asking? What assessment strategies do we employ to answer those questions? What structural approach works best to implement our strategies? This study attempts to provide the answer to the question of what internal structural factors need to be in place to demonstrate to external, as well as internal constituent, that the institution is effective. In doing so, it will also address the questions of what is being asked and what assessment strategies can be employed.

**Leadership and Institutional Effectiveness**

In higher education, as in any other field, leadership is a driving force behind the success of any undertaking within the institution. There are no shortages of definitions for the term leadership. Leadership has been defined by Fiedler (1967) as a process that involves directing and coordinating the work of group members. Roach and Behling (1984) defines leadership as the process of influencing an organized group toward
accomplishing its goals. Leadership is also defined as actions that focus resources to create desirable opportunities (Campbell, 1991).

Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy (2006) define leadership as a process rather than a position. They described leadership as a “complex phenomenon” involving the leaders, followers and the situation (Figure 6). The characteristic of a good or effective leader has consequently been influenced by the many definitions for leadership (Hughes, Ginnett, & Curphy, 2006). Considering all the various definitions of leadership, Owens and Valesky (2011) assert that leaders intentionally exercise influence on others through social interaction.

Research on leadership in large tend to focus on the leaders style or approach. Many of the theories on leadership can be classified as trait, behavioral, or contingency (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). In a complex organization such as an institution of higher learning, flexibility and adaptability become two important traits making situational leadership a highly ascribed leadership theory in education.

Situational leadership theory, developed by Kenneth Blanchard and Paul Hersey (1977) posits that no one leadership style is best. Therefore, leaders must choose their leadership style and make decisions based on the situation. Situational leadership is described as task specific, as leader focus on follower ability to perform certain tasks, and how they help them do so to the best of their ability. Hersey and Blanchard (1988) assert that leaders engage in one of four different style of leadership: directing, coaching, supporting, or delegating. As illustrated in Figure 7, the leadership style exercised depends on the followers’ level of readiness.

To be effective with this type of leadership, leaders must have a keen understanding of to their followers’ needs and capacities. Based on the situation, leaders must also be flexible and skilled enough to determine which leadership style is needed for each subordinate and how to implement effectively the selected style to realize the institution’s desired goals. Table 7 outlines the roles a leader would take with each of the four styles.

Table 7

**Situational Leadership Roles**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
<th>Leader’s Role</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Directing</strong></td>
<td>The leader provides specific instructions and closely supervises task accomplishment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coaching</strong></td>
<td>The leader continues to direct and closely supervise task accomplishment, but also explains decisions, solicits suggestions, and supports progress.</td>
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Table 7 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership Style</th>
<th>Leader’s Role</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Supporting</strong></td>
<td>The leader facilitates and supports subordinates' efforts toward task accomplishment and shares responsibility for decision-making with them.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Delegating</strong></td>
<td>The leader turns over responsibility for decision-making and problem-solving to subordinates.</td>
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Two additional leadership theories prevalent in higher education are transformational and transformative leadership. These two theories are considered relationship theories as they focus on the relationship between the leader and followers (Owens & Valesky, 2011). Transactional Leaders, as defined by Bass and Riggio (2005), consist of determining the transactions that must occur in order to allow subordinates to develop the confidence needed to accomplish the organization’s goals, and providing rewards and incentives for the accomplishment of the goals. The transformational leadership concept, initially introduced by James McGregor Burns and later expanded upon by Bernard Bass, is built on helping individuals see the importance of working towards a goal for the greater good. Transformational leaders motivate and inspire their followers to do more by helping them to transcend their own self-interest and expand their needs portfolio (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008).
Leadership affects all aspects of the institution, and can subsequently inhibit or advance the institution’s levels of effectiveness. Therefore, leaders must possess the knowledge, skills and disposition needed to drive the accreditation process and the institution’s ability to document its levels of effectiveness. The leader’s role is to promote, support, and monitor. First, leaders must promote a culture of assessment, and accountability. An effective educational leader understands that assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness is directly tied to the institution’s purpose (mission), and is a shared responsibility that must be cultivated in a culture of awareness and accountability, if it is to be done correctly. Amey (2006) posits that higher education leaders must be able to provide “authentic insights that come from critical reflection about and deep understanding of organizational culture and values” (p. 56). Secondly, higher education leaders’ ability to motivate and influence others plays an important role in the capacity to be effective. Leaders need to engage and support their subordinates in their roles. Hughes, Ginnett, and Curphy. (2006) assert that leaders who consider both the rational (logical) and emotional sides of human experience are more effective. Finally, leaders should be involved and monitor institutional performance at all times (Kotter, 1996; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008).

Organizational Change

The driver behind institutional effectiveness is that there is on-going assessment that leads to continuous improvements based on the assessment results. Organizations often have to experience metamorphoses to bring about desired levels of improvements. Lunenburg (2010) defines Organizational change as the movement of an organization
away from its present state and toward some desired future state to increase its effectiveness. However, necessary change may be it is often met with resistance (Evans, 1996; Kotter, 1996; Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Lunenburg, 2010). Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) postulate that the causes of resistance, or the forces to maintain the status quo often include interference with need fulfillment, fear of the unknown, threats to power and influence, knowledge and skills obsolescence, organizational structure, and limited resources among other things. The challenge for leaders remains identifying effective ways to reduce this resistance. Increasing driving forces such as accountability, reducing restraining forces such as those indicated above, or considering new driving forces are three suggestions to achieve this (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008). The caveat however, is that to achieve a new balance without increasing tension and conflict, leaders must decrease one set of forces as they increase the other, and vice versa (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008).

Kurt Lewin’s (1951) force field analysis is one theory that attempt to explain this phenomenon. This theory provides an analytical approach to help organizations understand how to analyze and promote change within the organization (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Owens & Valesky, 2011). Lewin’s force field analysis views the organizational status quo as a state of equilibrium, resulting from the balance between two opposing forces; driving forces (forces for change) and restraining forces (forces for remaining unchanged). Change therefore can only occur when the equilibrium is upset by the removal or weakening of these forces (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008; Owens & Valesky, 2011). Figure 8 provides an illustration of the factors Lunenburg and Ornstein
(2008) identified as causes of resistance to change and pressures for change using Lewin’s force-field analysis.

Figure 8. Lunenburg and Ornstein’s Pressures for Change and Resistance to Change Model

One change strategy orientation that is effective in complex organizations such as an institution of higher learning is the normative-reeducative strategies of change. This strategy is based on an understanding of the organization and the people within them, and is widely known as organizational self-renewal. The end product is a shift in the culture of the organization. Lunenburg and Ornstein (2008) explain,

Organizational self-renewal postulates that effective change cannot be imposed on a school; rather it seeks to develop an internal capacity for continuous problem solving. The process of renewal include the increased capacity to (a) sense and
identify emerging problems; (b) establish goals, objectives and priorities; (c)
generate valid alternative solutions; and (d) implement the selected alternative.

(pp. 182-183)

As most researchers have pointed out, and many institutions have experienced, change is not an easy undertaking. Kotter (1996) notes that underestimating the difficulties of implementing change often results in failure. Kotter identified eight common errors to organizational change efforts: (a) allowing too much complacency; (b) failing to create a sufficiently powerful guiding coalition; (c) underestimating the power of vision; (d) under communicating the vision by a factor of 10 (or 100 or 1000); (e) permitting obstacles to block the new vision; (f) failing to create short-term wins; (g) declaring victory too soon; and (h) neglecting to anchor changes firmly in the corporate culture. He also asserts that as a result of these errors the new strategies are not implemented well, acquisition do not achieve expected synergies, reengineering takes too long and cost too much, downsizing does not get cost under control, and quality programs do not deliver hoped-for results (Kotter, 2012). Understanding factors within the organization that resist needed change is one way to avoid these errors (Kotter, 1996).

To help organizations improve their ability to change and avoid failure, John Kotter (1995) developed the 8-Step Change Model for implementing change powerfully and successfully. These eight steps, developed to address the eight fundamental errors, include establishing a sense of urgency, creating the guiding coalition, developing a vision and strategy, communication the change vision, empowering broad-based action,
generating short-term wins, consolidating gains and producing more change and anchoring new approaches in the culture. Each step is outlined in Table 8.

Table 8

*Kotter’s 8-Step Change Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Establishing a Sense of Urgency</strong></td>
<td>Examining the market and competitive realities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifying and discussing crises, potential crises, or major opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Creating the Guiding Coalition</strong></td>
<td>Putting together a group with enough power to lead the change</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Getting the group to work together like a team</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Developing a Vision and Strategy</strong></td>
<td>Creating a vision to help direct the change effort</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Communication the Change</strong></td>
<td>Developing strategies for achieving that vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vision</strong></td>
<td>Using every vehicle possible to constantly communicate the new vision and strategies</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Having the guiding coalition role model the behavior expected of employees</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Empowering Broad-Based Action</strong></td>
<td>Getting rid of obstacles</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Generating Short-Term Wins</strong></td>
<td>Change systems or structures that undermine the change vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Encouraging risk taking and nontraditional ideas, activities, and actions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Planning for visible improvements in performance, or “wins”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Creating those wins</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Visibility recognizing and rewarding people who made the wins possible</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 8 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Steps</th>
<th>Tasks</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Consolidating Gains and Producing More Change</strong></td>
<td>Using increased credibility to change all systems, structures, and policies that don’t fit together and don’t fit the transformation vision&lt;br&gt;<strong>Hiring, promoting, and developing people who can implement the change vision</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Reinvigorating the process with new projects, themes, and change agents</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Anchoring New Approaches in the Culture</strong></td>
<td>Creating better performance through customer- and productivity-oriented behavior, more and better leadership, and more effective management&lt;br&gt;<strong>Articulating the connections between new behaviors and organizational success</strong>&lt;br&gt;<strong>Developing means to ensure leadership development and succession</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Organizational change is not a simple or stress-free endeavor, as noted by Kotter (2012), it often requires “a multistep process that creates power and motivation sufficient to overwhelm all sources of inertia” (p. 20). In any change effort, it is critical that organizations first build the capacity to initiate change. Additionally, to be effective and successful, major change requires the leader to take an active and supporting role (Lunenburg, 2010; Kotter, 2012).
Organizational Culture

There are a considerable number of definitions for organizational culture. The consensus however, has been that there are multiple characteristics that collectively represent and give meaning to the culture of an organization. Organizational culture is defined as shared philosophies, ideologies, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, expectations, attitudes, norms, and values (Alvesson, 2002). Luneburg and Ornstein (2008) posit that organizational culture includes the beliefs, feelings, behaviors, and symbols that are characteristic of the organization. Owens and Valesky (2011) assert that organizational culture arises over time and is defined by a number of overlapping symbolic elements including values and beliefs, traditions and rituals, history, stories and myths, heroes and heroines, and behavior norms.

As depicted in Figure 9, culture impacts all aspects of the organization, including leadership, motivation, communication, decision making, organization structure, systems of evaluation, control and rewards, and change (Lunenburg & Ornstein, 2008).

*Figure 9.* Lunenburg and Ornstein’s Model of Dimensions of Organizational Culture
An understanding of the organization’s culture is a vital component of effective leadership. Culture provides a better understanding of the people (human behavior), the environment, and ultimately the person-environment interaction (Owens & Valesky, 2011; Preedy, Glatter, & Wise, 2003). Kurt Lewin’s equation for human behavior \( B = F (P, S) \) or \( B = f (p. e) \) attempts to provides an explanation for this interaction. It postulates that human behavior is a function of the individual in the context of the social environment. Thus, although educational leaders cannot always control employee behavior, they can influence their behavior by helping to shape the institution’s culture, as culture plays a major role in determining the behavior of the employees (Preedy, Glatter, & Wise, 2003).

**Summary**

Chapter II provides a review of the literature relevant to this study. Studies on higher education accreditation in the United States and assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness are presented in great detail. Additionally, literature institutional factors that influence institutional effectiveness, such as leadership, organizational/institutional cultures, and organizational change are also presented.
CHAPTER III

CONCEPTUAL/THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Research Design

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how variables within the institution’s internal environment impacts its ability to evidence institutional effectiveness related to student learning as demarcated by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). The SACSCOC standard reviewed in this study, comprehensive standard 3.3.1.1 (Institutional Effectiveness – Educational Programs), was chosen because it outlines specific components of student learning assessment that directly determine the levels of effectiveness for an institution.

The conceptual framework for this study (see Figure 10) draws from Suskie’s (2009) model of institutional effectiveness. In this model, student learning, which Suskie described as the heart of each institution’s mission, is identified as central to assessing and achieving institutional effectiveness. In addition, the independent internal variables (institutional leadership and administration; institutional structure of planning assessment and research; allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources in key IE areas; institutional culture; institutional planning and assessment processes; use of technology in key IE areas; and accreditation preparation period) were selected based on the premise that changes in any of these variables can impact parts of, as well as overall, institutional effectiveness.
Due to the descriptive nature of this study and the variables identified, a qualitative approach was used. Merriam (1998) describes qualitative research as “an umbrella concept covering several forms of inquiry to help us understand and explain the meaning of social phenomena with little disruption of the natural setting as possible” (p. 5). Similarly, Creswell (2009) defines qualitative research as “a means for exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem” (p. 4).

To gain an in-depth understanding of the relationship between the independent variables and the dependent variable institutional effectiveness correlated with student learning, a case study methodology was selected. Merriam (1998) describes a case as “a
thing, a single entity, a unit around which there are boundaries” (p. 27). Similarly, Miles and Huberman (1994) described a case study as “a phenomenon of some sort occurring in a bounded context” (p. 25).

This qualitative inquiry uses a multi-site case study approach in which demonstration of institutional effectiveness and student learning assessment is reviewed at multiple institutions. As illustrated in Yin’s (1989) Multiple-Case Study Method diagram (Figure 11), the study is replicated at each institution and the case findings are analyzed, then a comparative or cross-case analysis is conducted.

These analyses are conducted to determine if the conditions at each of the institutions are idiosyncratic to that site or, if there are commonalities in the internal environments at each institution that can further explain the phenomenon. Seven institutions were selected; two were used for literal replication, and five were used for theoretical replication. This cross-site analysis approach allows for improved external validity and generalization of the research findings (Yin, 1989; Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2009).

Yin (1989) stated that the unique strength of a case study is “its ability to deal with a full variety of evidence—documents, artifacts, interviews, and observations” (p. 20). For that reason, to answer the research questions outlined in Chapter I, a number of qualitative data collection techniques were used, including documents (public and private), survey responses, and interviews with key personnel. A triangulation approach was used to cross-check the data collected from each source, identify predictabilities among the variables, and provide a complete picture of how IE can be impacted (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009; Sapsford & Jupp, 1996). This approach allows for greater understanding about the phenomena.

**Theory of Variables**

As revealed in the literature, the driving forces behind the concept of institutional effectiveness in higher education have been institutional accountability and accreditation (Ewell, 2011; Manning, 2011; Head, 2011). However, the term institutional effectiveness is often broadly defined and used interchangeably with various terms such as assessment, evaluation, and accountability. This study draws on Head’s (2011) theory which
describes institutional effectiveness as the umbrella term covering related terms such as evaluation, institutional research, assessment, or outcomes analysis (see Figure 12). With this theory, Head identifies three components of institutional effectiveness: (a) Assessment (Student), (b) Evaluation (Program), and (c) Institutional Research (Head, 2011). Although there are numerous factors that contribute to the overall effectiveness of an institution, this study focuses on effectiveness levels specifically related to students (assessment of student learning), and is based on the concept that IE planning, assessment, and subsequent improvement is dependent on institutional capacity in various areas, in particular, those identified as the independent variables for this study.

Figure 12. Head’s (2011) Model of Institutional Effectiveness
The seven independent variables are institutional leadership and administration, institutional structure of planning assessment and research, allocation of resources in key IE areas, use of technology in key IE areas, institutional planning and assessment processes, institutional culture, and institutional accreditation preparation periods. These variables are categorized as internal factors of the institutions.

**Relationship among Variables**

It is believed that, either individually or collectively, the seven independent variables identified could impact the institution’s ability to prove its levels of effectiveness. How they impact IE is what this study seeks to answer. Figure 13 provides an illustration of the Relationship between Independent and Dependent Variables.

The researcher also believes that there is an interdependent relationship between the independent variables. In this relationship, institutional leadership and administration remains an independent variable, however, the remaining six independent variables (institutional structure of planning assessment and research, allocation of resources in key IE areas, use of technology in key IE areas, institutional planning and assessment processes, institutional culture, and institutional accreditation preparation periods) become dependent variable of leadership and administration. This interrelated relationship is illustrated in Figure 14.
Figure 13. Independent and Dependent Variables
Figure 14. Interdependent Relationships between Independent Variables

**Definition of Variables and Other Terms**

Conceptual definitions of the variables and key terms critical to understanding this study are provided in this section.

**Dependent Variable**

**Institutional Effectiveness** as defined by SACSCOC is “the systematic, explicit, and documented process of measuring institutional performance against mission in all aspects of an institution” (p. 16). In this study, the focus is on student learning assessment.
Independent Variables

**Institutional Leadership and Administration** is defined as a role that individuals responsible and authorized to support and facilitate the institutional effectiveness functions undertake. This examines their involvement and levels of support in the accreditation process, overall improvement efforts for academic and educational support programs and services, as well as methods and practices for holding employees accountable for the execution of assigned duties based on their functions and responsibilities.

**Institutional Structure for Planning, Assessment and Research** defines how the enterprise-wide Planning, Assessment and Institutional Research departments are structured and/or integrated to achieve the expected outcomes for effectiveness. It also examines the permanent structure of personnel appointed to carry out IE and/or accreditation related activities.

**Institutional Allocation of Human, Fiscal, and Physical Resources in Key IE Areas** is defined as the distribution of human, fiscal and physical resources in the departments of Planning, Assessment and/or Institutional Research. This includes the quantity, expertise, longevity and status (full-time/part-time) of personnel, the total amount of financial resources allocated to specific IE areas for various activities including professional development training, accreditation, and the availability of facilities for personnel in these areas (i.e. office spaces, document storage facilities, and general meeting and training areas).
Use of Technology in Key IE Areas is defined as the application of electronic system(s) to support processes related to institutional effectiveness. This includes the type of platform(s) used by the institution, the maintenance and integrity of the platform for data collection and analysis, and the actual levels of usage by constituents (end-users).

Institutional Planning and Assessment Processes is defined as the institution’s means of evidencing that ongoing assessment is occurring, and how they demonstrate that the assessment results are being used to inform and/or improve continual planning-based decision making, and resource allocation.

Institutional (Organizational)Culture is defined as shared philosophies, ideologies, beliefs, feelings, assumptions, expectations, attitudes, norms, and values (Alvesson, 2002) that impacts all areas of the organization (leadership, motivation, communication, decision making, etc.), support assessment, accountability and shared responsibility, and enables change and improvements within the organization.

Institutional Accreditation Preparation Period is defined as the time devoted to the accreditation related self-study. This includes the timeline for data collection, assessment, report writing and final review.

Other Terms

Accreditation is defined as a review of the quality of higher education institutions and programs. In the United States, accreditation is a major way that stakeholders, including students, families, government officials, and the public, know that an institution or program provides a quality education (CHEA, 2013).
Accreditation by SACS Commission on Colleges means that the institution:

1. has a mission appropriate to higher education,
2. has resources, programs, and services sufficient to accomplish and sustain that mission, and
3. maintains clearly specified educational objectives that are consistent with its mission and appropriate to the degrees it offers, and that indicate whether it is successful in achieving its stated objectives. (SACSCOC, 2011, p. 1)

Comprehensive Standards (CS) are standards specific to the operations of an institution, represent good practice in higher education, and establish a level of accomplishment expected of all member institutions. The Comprehensive Standards set forth requirements in the following four areas: (a) institutional mission, governance, and effectiveness; (b) educational programs; (c) resources; and (d) institutional responsibility for Commission policies (SACSCOC, 2012a, p. 35). Comprehensive Standards are more specific to the operations of an institution than the Core Requirements; the

Comprehensive Standards (3.1-3.14 in The Principles of Accreditation) represent good practice in higher education and establish a level of accomplishment expected of all institutions seeking Initial Accreditation or Reaffirmation of Accreditation (SACSCOC, 2011).

Committees on Compliance and Reports (C & R Committees) reviews (a) applications for membership and some substantive changes, (b) reports prepared by evaluation committees, (c) institutional responses to reports prepared by evaluation committees, (d) monitoring reports, and (e) other reports requested by the Board of
Trustees. The C & R Committee is a standing committee of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees (SACSCOC, 2011).

**Compliance Certification.** The Compliance Certification is the document completed by the institution to demonstrate its compliance with Core Requirements (except for 2.12), Comprehensive Standards (except for 3.3.2), and Federal Requirements (SACSCOC, 2011).

**Core Requirements (CR)** are defined as basic, broad-based, fundamental requirements that an institution must meet to be accredited with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC, 2012a).

**Disclosure Statement** is defined as a public written statement that discloses the action taken by the Board of Trustee of SACS Commission on Colleges against an institution found non-compliant with a Core Requirement, Comprehensive Standard, and/or Federal Requirement.

**Federal Requirements (FR)** are defined as criteria responding to federal mandates that institutions are required to document compliance with. The Commission is obligated to consider the compliance of institutions reviewed for initial membership or continued accreditation (SACSCOC, 2012a).

**Level** is defined as the classifications of member institutions by the Commission on Colleges according to the highest degree offered. Member institutions are designated as operating at one of six levels: Level I Associate; Level II Baccalaureate; Level III Master; Level IV Educational Specialist; Level V Doctorate (3 or fewer); or Level VI Doctorate (4 or more) (SACSCOC, 2011).
**Off-Site Review Committee** is a committee composed of a Chair and evaluators for finance, institutional effectiveness, organization and administration, student support services, learning support services, and two or more evaluators for educational programs. The Off-Site Review Committee completes the first review of the Compliance Certification developed by a Member institution seeking Reaffirmation of Accreditation (SACSCOC, 2011).

**On-Site Review Committee** is a committee composed of a minimum of seven members (the Chair and evaluators in the areas of organization/governance, faculty, educational programs, student support services, institutional effectiveness, and the Quality Enhancement Plan), who visits a Member institution seeking Reaffirmation of Accreditation (SACSCOC, 2011).

**Probation** is defined as a more serious COC sanction than Warning, that is usually, but not necessarily, invoked by the SACSCOC as the last step before an institution is removed from membership (SACSCOC, 2011).

**Reaffirmation of Accreditation** is defined as the process for ensuring that Member Institutions maintain continuing compliance with Commission policies and with *The Principles of Accreditation*. An institution must be reaffirmed five years after it gains Initial Accreditation and every ten years thereafter. This process involves a collective analysis and judgment by the institution’s internal constituencies, an informed review by peers external to the institution, and a reasoned decision by the elected members of the SACSCOC Board of Trustees (SACSCOC, 2011).
Sanction is defined as the action taken when an institution that fails to comply with any of the Core Requirements, demonstrates significant noncompliance with the Comprehensive Standards, fails to make significant progress towards correcting deficiencies within the time allotted, or does not comply with SACSCOC policies. The sanction may be warning or probation (SACSCOC, 2011).

The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC) is the regional body for the accreditation of degree-granting higher education institutions in the Southern states. It serves as the common denominator of shared values and practices among the diverse institutions in Alabama, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Mississippi, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia and Latin America and other international sites approved by the Commission on Colleges that award associate, baccalaureate, master’s, or doctoral degrees (Commission on Colleges, 2013).

Track A Institutions are defined as COC accredited institution that offers undergraduate degrees only (Level I-III institutions). The term is used to classify institutions during the reaffirmation process (SACSCOC, 2012a).

Track B Institutions are defined as COC accredited institution that offers undergraduate and graduate degrees or graduate degrees only (Level III – VI institutions). The term is used to classify institutions during the reaffirmation process (SACSCOC, 2012a).

Warning is defined as the less serious of the two COC sanctions, it is usually, but not necessarily, levied in the earlier stages of institutional review and often, but not
necessarily, precedes Probation. However, a warning cannot succeed probation (SACSCOC, 2011).

**Limitation and Delimitations of the Study**

A qualitative multi-site case study is not an easy undertaking. This type of research requires a great deal of time, and in many instances resources (Merriam, 1998). Determining the appropriate number of cases necessary for this type of research is an imperative task (Yin, 1989, 2009) that requires a researcher to be skilled enough to avoid expending unnecessary resources and time, and possibly prolonging the study (Creswell, 2007). Creswell (1994) also asserts that the researcher must be skilled enough to identify the case(s) worth studying. This study required at least six participants to effectively engage in a cross experiment logic for analysis through lateral and theoretical replication (Yin, 1989, 2009). To address concerns of reliability and validity the researcher utilized methods triangulation, where data was collected through multiple sources from the participants (Patten, 2009), this made analyzing and interpreting the data collected an extremely time consuming process.

Identifying, selecting and gaining access to participants were also limitations. First, identifying institutions cited for noncompliance at any point in the review proved to be a challenging endeavor as the names of institutions in a noncompliance status prior to the C & R review is not public information. Secondly, the institutions chosen needed to be ones from which the most can be learned and the study could be replicated (Merriam, 1998). In addition, the participants at each institution needed to be carefully selected from among those who play an active role in the institution’s effectiveness practices to
provide accurate and relevant data. Gaining access to the institutions and/or convincing individuals to participate presented its own set of challenges as some institutions were reluctant to share information that could possibly portray them unfavorably or as ineffective. All of the interviews were conducted via telephone, and while necessary information was gathered, this too can be seen as a limitation as it constricted the researcher interaction with the participants.

The delimitations of this study are used to define the parameters set for the study. For example, as revealed in the research, institutional effectiveness is a multifaceted phenomenon; however, this study is intentionally centered on one particular component of institutional effectiveness, evidencing student learning, and is therefore built around SACSCOC Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1. While the researcher views this more as delimitation, it does mean that other variables of effectiveness are not examined in this study. Finally, the data used for this study are based on reviews conducted during the 2011-2012 year only, although this presents its own limitations in terms of the number of institutions eligible to participate, it ensures that the standards being reviewed are consistent as SACSCOC standards and criteria have evolved over the years. These limitations and delimitations provide a number of opportunities for researchers to expound upon through future study.

Summary

Chapter III provides an overview of the theoretical/conceptual framework of this study. It also provides a rationale for the design of this qualitative inquiry that uses a multi-site case study approach. The theory of the variables and the relationship among
the variables used to examine how higher education institutions ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness (IE) is impacted, as well as the definition of these variables are also outlined in this chapter. In addition, Chapter III delineates the limitations of this study.
CHAPTER IV
METHODOLOGY

Introduction

Chapter IV provides an overview of the research methodology applied to this study in order to understand the relationship between the internal environment of higher education institutions, and institutional effectiveness defined by student learning. To gain an in-depth understanding of this phenomenon, this qualitative inquiry takes on a multisite case study methodological approach.

This chapter also describes the setting, sampling procedures, and participants. In addition, the rationale for the selected instruments, data collection procedures, and data analysis methods are presented in this chapter.

Design of the Study

Qualitative Paradigm

Qualitative research is traditionally used to understand and explain the meaning of a social phenomenon from the views of the participants (Merriam, 1998; Creswell 1994, 2009). This type of research is ideal in seeking an in-depth understanding of the effectiveness phenomenon in a higher education environment. Unlike quantitative research inquiry, which is based on testing a theory composed of variables (Creswell, 1994) or quantifying phenomena to answer questions of how much or how many,
qualitative research is based on understanding the meanings people construct (Merriam, 1998). Creswell (1994) provided five criteria to consider when choosing between the qualitative and quantitative paradigm: researcher’s worldview, researcher’s training and experience, researcher’s psychological attributes, the nature of the problem, and the audience. Table 9 provides a comparative overview of the criteria for selecting between the two research strategies.

Table 9

Reason for Selecting a Paradigm

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Quantitative Paradigm</th>
<th>Qualitative Paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Researcher’s Worldview</strong></td>
<td>A researcher’s comfort with the ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions of the quantitative paradigm</td>
<td>A researcher’s comfort with the ontological, epistemological, axiological, rhetorical, and methodological assumptions of the quantitative paradigm</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Training and Experience of the Researcher</strong></td>
<td>Technical writing skills; computer statistical skills; library skills</td>
<td>Literary writing skills; computer text-analysis skills; library skills</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Researcher’s Psychological Attributes</strong></td>
<td>Comfort with rules and guidelines for conducting research; low tolerance for ambiguity; time for a study of short duration</td>
<td>Comfort with lack of specific rules and procedures for conducting research; high tolerance for ambiguity; time for lengthy study</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 9 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Criteria</th>
<th>Quantitative Paradigm</th>
<th>Qualitative Paradigm</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nature of the Problem</strong></td>
<td>Previously studied by other researches so that body of literature exists; known variables; existing theories</td>
<td>Exploratory research; variables unknown; context important; may lack theory base for study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Audience for the study (e.g., journal editors and readers, graduate committees)</strong></td>
<td>Individuals accustomed to/supportive of quantitative studies</td>
<td>Individuals accustomed to/supportive of qualitative studies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Qualitative research can take on many forms of inquiry, including grounded theory, ethnography, case study, narrative, and phenomenology. Merriam (1998) identified five common types of qualitative research in education (see Table 10).

Table 10

*Common Types of Qualitative Research in Education*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Basic or Generic</strong></td>
<td>Includes description, interpretation, and understanding</td>
<td>Meaning-making in transformational learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Identifies recurrent patterns in the form of themes or categories</td>
<td>(Courtenay, Merriam, and Reeves, forthcoming)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>May delineate a process</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 10 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Characteristics</th>
<th>Example</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Ethnography</strong></td>
<td>Focuses on society and culture</td>
<td>A study of twenty successful Hispanic high school students (Corderio and Carspecken, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uncovers and describes beliefs, values, and attitudes that structure behavior of a group</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Phenomenology</strong></td>
<td>Is concerned with essence or basic structure of a phenomenon</td>
<td>The role of intuition in reflective practice (Mott, 1994)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uses data that are the participant’s and the investigator’s firsthand experience of the phenomenon</td>
<td>Practices inhibiting school effectiveness (Aviram, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grounded Theory</strong></td>
<td>Is designed to inductively build a substantive theory regarding some aspect of practice</td>
<td>A framework for describing developmental change among older adults (Fisher, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Is “grounded” in the real world</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Case Study</strong></td>
<td>Is intensive, holistic description and analysis of a single unit or bounded system</td>
<td>A comparative case study of power relationships in two graduate classrooms (Tisdell, 1993)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Can be combined with any of the above types</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Regardless of the type of qualitative research selected, Merriam (1998) noted that there are five essential characteristics of all forms of qualitative research:

1. Qualitative researchers are interested in understanding the meaning people constructed.

2. The researcher is the primary instrument for data collection and analysis.

3. Qualitative research usually involves fieldwork.

4. Qualitative research primarily employs an inductive research strategy.

5. The product of qualitative research is richly descriptive. (pp. 4-5)

These characteristics make a qualitative approach ideal for understanding the relationship between variables of the institution’s internal environment and documentation of institutional effectiveness correlated to assessment of student learning.

**Rationale for Case Study Approach**

A case study is a qualitative research methodology that has been described in terms of process, end product, and the object of study (the case). Case studies have been defined as “intensive holistic description and analysis of a single instance, phenomenon, or social unit” (Merriam, 1998, p. 27). It has also been defined as an all-encompassing research method (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Yin (1989) explained that a case study is an “empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real-life context; when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly evident and in which multiple sources of evidence are used” (p. 23). Similarly, Creswell (2009) defined case studies as,
A strategy of inquiry in which the researcher derives a general, abstract theory of a process, action, or interaction grounded in the views of participants. Cases are bounded by time and activity, and researchers collect detailed information using a variety of data collection procedures over a sustained period of time. (p. 13).

Merriam (1998) defined three special features of a case study, characterizing qualitative case studies as particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic. Merriam further elaborated on these features stating,

Particularistic means that case studies focus on a particular situation, event, program, or phenomenon. The case itself is important for what it reveals about the phenomenon and for what it might represent.

Descriptive means that the end product of a case study is a rich, “thick” description of the phenomenon under study. Thick description is a term from anthropology and means the complete, literal description of the incident or entity being investigated.

Heuristic means that case studies illuminate the readers’ understanding of the phenomenon under study. They can bring about discovery of new meaning, extend the readers experience, or confirm what is known. (p. 29)

While qualitative case studies are prevalent throughout the field of education (Merriam, 1998), a case study is not an easy undertaking, and researchers must have certain skills to be successful in this endeavor. Yin (1989) asserts that the intellectual, and emotional demands of a case study, even its impact on the researcher’s ego, far exceeds those of any other research strategy. In examining the skill-set needed to
conduct a case study, Yin (1989) noted that the ability to ask good questions, listen, remain unbiased and develop a firm grasp of the issue being studied are commonly required skills.

The particularistic, descriptive, and heuristic case study approach to qualitative research is appropriate for this study as it will allow the researcher to provide a descriptive and explanatory answer (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009) to the questions of how institutions document their levels of effectiveness, and how their internal environment shapes the process. As noted by Merriam (1998), the uniqueness of a case study lies in the knowledge it can reveal about the phenomenon.

**Multisite Case Study Methodology**

The term *multisite case studies* is often used interchangeable with other terms such as multiple-case studies (Yin, 2009), collective case studies, cross case, multicase studies or comparative case studies (Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2009). Regardless of the term used, the general premise is the same. Rather than conducting a single case study analysis, the study was replicated at multiple sites, and each case finding was analyzed then subjected to cross-analysis. Subsequently, each institution was studied as a single case, and following the cross-experiment logic (Yin, 1989), a cross-case analysis was conducted. A multisite case study approach allowed the researcher to understand the phenomenon in the context of individual institutions and compare the finding across institutions, thereby enhancing the reliability and external validly or generalizability of the study (Yin, 1989; Merriam, 1998; Creswell, 2009).
To attain the most compelling results from this multi-site case study, Yin’s (1989) cross-experiment logic for the analysis was employed. Using both literal and theoretical replication (Yin, 1989), a total of seven institutions were examined. Two of the institutions were used for literal replication; these institutions have all experienced difficulties in evidencing institutional effectiveness through student learning and achievement, or in other words, were cited as non-compliant with CS 3.3.1.1 during one of the reaffirmation review phases and sanctioned by SACSCOC. These institutions were denied reaffirmation of accreditation. The remaining institutions were used for theoretical replication. Three of the remaining institutions were cited as noncompliant with CS 3.3.1.1 during one of the reaffirmation review phases; however, these institutions were not sanctioned by SACSCOC, and were reaffirmed. The remaining two institutions were not cited as noncompliant with CS 3.3.1.1 during any of the phases of the reaffirmation review process and were also reaffirmed. By replicating the study at different institutions, each case can be viewed as an independent measure and this can, therefore, analytically be seen as another form of triangulation.

Before undertaking this type of study the researcher considered the complexities and limitations of a multi-site case study and case studies in general. Research has indicated that determining the number of cases necessary for a multiple case study (Yin, 1989, 2009), and which case(s) are worthy of study can be challenging (Creswell, 1994, 2009). Another challenge is that case studies can require a great deal of time and resources (Merriam, 1998). Researchers have also noted that case studies can sometimes lead readers to erroneous conclusion by “oversimplifying or exaggerating a situation”
(Guba & Lincoln, 1981). The integrity of the researcher as the primary instrument of collection may also pose a challenge in case study research (Merriam, 1998; Guba & Lincoln, 1981). Researchers may acquire needed training in interviewing, observation, or constructing a final report to combat a number of the limitations in conducting a case study; however, as noted by Merriam (1998), “the investigator is left to rely on his or her own instincts and abilities throughout most of this research effort” (p. 42).

**Description of the Setting**

The participants for this study were selected from a list of institutions that had undergone the decennial reaffirmation review with SACS Commission on Colleges (COC) during the 2011-2012 reaffirmation process. The 2011-2012 reaffirmation review included a total of 157 institutions of various sizes and types including public, private not-for-profit and private for-profit institutions. This group is divided into two categories during the reaffirmation process: Track A - COC accredited institutions that offer undergraduate degrees only, and Track B - COC accredited institutions that offer undergraduate and graduate degrees or graduate degrees only (SACSCOC, 2011). Subsequently, Track A includes institutions designated as levels I and II, and Track B, includes institutions designated as levels III, IV, V, and VI. During the 2011-2012 reaffirmation 72 of the institutions reviewed were Track A, and 85 of the institutions reviewed were Track B.

Because the reaffirmation process is the same for all institutions (SACSCOC, 2011), regardless of size, type, mission or degrees offered, this study examines institutions from both Track A and Track B. Four of the seven institutions selected were
Track A institutions and three were classified as Track B institutions. Five of the institutions were public institutions and the remaining two were private-not-for-profit institutions. The institutions ranged in size from “small two-year” institutions to “medium four-year institutions” and represent four of the 11 states in the southern region; this includes Alabama, Georgia, South Carolina, and Texas. Table 11 provides an overview of the selected institutions.

Table 11

Selected Institutions Profiles

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution Code</th>
<th>COC Level</th>
<th>Institution Type</th>
<th>Size and Setting*</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I-1</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Private Not-for-Profit</td>
<td>S4/HR: Small four-year, highly residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-2</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>S4/R: Small four-year, primarily residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-3</td>
<td>VI</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>M4/NR: Medium four-year, primarily nonresidential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-4</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Private Not-for-Profit</td>
<td>S2: Small two-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-5</td>
<td>I</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>L2: Large two-year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-6</td>
<td>III</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>M4/R: Medium four-year, primarily residential</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-7</td>
<td>II</td>
<td>Public</td>
<td>S4/NR: Small four-year, primarily nonresidential</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The institutions' size and setting indicated above are based on the latest Carnegie Classification. These classifications, defined in Table 12, are considered a snapshot and are based on data from 2008 to 2010 (Carnegie Foundation, 2013).
### Table 12

**Carnegie Classification Description**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting and Size</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S2: Small two-year</td>
<td>Fall enrollment data show FTE* enrollment of fewer than 500 students at these associate’s degree granting institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>L2: Large two-year</td>
<td>Fall enrollment data show FTE* enrollment of 5,000–9,999 students at these associate’s degree granting institutions.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4/NR: Small four-year, primarily nonresidential</td>
<td>Fall enrollment data show FTE* enrollment of 1,000–2,999 degree-seeking students at these bachelor’s degree granting institutions. Fewer than 25% of degree-seeking undergraduates live on campus** and/or fewer than 50% attend full time (includes exclusively distance education institutions).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4/R: Small four-year, primarily residential</td>
<td>Fall enrollment data show FTE* enrollment of 1,000–2,999 degree-seeking students at these bachelor’s degree granting institutions; 25% to 49% of degree-seeking undergraduates live on campus** and at least 50% attend full time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S4/HR: Small four-year, highly residential</td>
<td>Fall enrollment data show FTE enrollment of 1,000–2,999 degree-seeking students at these bachelor’s degree granting institutions. At least half of degree-seeking undergraduates live on campus** and at least 80% attend full time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>M4/NR: Medium four-year, primarily nonresidential</td>
<td>Fall enrollment data show FTE* enrollment of 3,000–9,999 degree-seeking students at these bachelor’s degree granting institutions. Fewer than 25% of degree-seeking undergraduates live on campus** and/or fewer than 50% attend full time (includes exclusively distance education institutions).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 12 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Setting and Size</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M4/R: Medium four-year, primarily residential</td>
<td>Fall enrollment data show FTE* enrollment of 3,000–9,999 degree-seeking students at these bachelor’s degree granting institutions; 25% to 49% of degree-seeking undergraduates live on campus** and at least 50% attend full time.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Note. *FTE: Full-time equivalent enrollment was calculated as full-time plus one-third part-time. **On campus is defined as institutionally-owned, -controlled, or -affiliated housing. Adapted from Carnegie Foundation (2013). *Carnegie Classification: Size & Setting Classification.* Retrieved from http://classifications.carnegiefoundation.org/descriptions/size_setting.php

**Sampling Procedures**

Each participant was purposefully selected from the population of institutions. Merriam (1998) asserts, “purposeful sampling is based on the assumption that the investigator want to discover, understand, and gain insight and therefore must select a sample from which the most can be learned” (p. 61). The decision of which institution to select was guided by the purpose of the study and Yin’s (1989) replication logic for multiple-case design. Since each institution was studied as a single case, and a comparative analysis of each individual case finding was conducted, establishing the selection criteria was an essential component in the purposive sampling. The researcher wanted to identify institutions that would reflect the diversity of the reaffirmation class of 2011- 2012, but more importantly, institutions that would be able to provide useful data
to address the research questions and the purpose of the study. The following criteria were established: (a) each institution selected had to be a part of the 2011-2012 SACSCOC Reaffirmation Class; (b) institutions must be classified as public or private not-for-profit; and (c) each institution should range in size from small 2-year to medium 4-year. The researcher also decided to select institutions that would represent polar types in the reaffirmation process for both literal and theoretical replication. This meant that the sample had to include at least two institutions that were denied reaffirmation of accreditation (Literal replication), and at least four that were successfully reaffirmed (theoretical replication). In a study of this nature it is best to ensure that the sample size is not too large. Eisenhardt (1989) recommends utilizing no more than 10 cases. The researcher utilized a total of seven cases in this study.

The researcher sent an initial invite letter to participate in the study to 38 of the 157 institutions reviewed for reaffirmation of accreditation in 2011-2012 via email. This population included on public and private not-for-profit institutions; no proprietary institutions were selected. The letter outlined the purpose of the study and provided a link to access and complete survey (see Appendix A). All participants were asked to consent to participating in the study prior to completing the survey (see Appendix B). A total of 12 institutions responded, and nine of the institutions agreed to participate in the study and completed the survey; however, only eight of the nine institutions took part in the interview. The researcher only included institutions that provided sufficient data by completing both the on-line survey and the follow-up interview. Eight institutions completed both parts of the study; however, after the individual case analysis, the final
population included only seven institutions. These seven were selected because the researcher identified them as institutions from which the most could be learned.

**Human Subjects/Consent**

Prior to engaging in any data collection procedures the researcher completed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) training and obtained permission from the IRB committee to complete the study (see Appendix C). To ensure that there were no ethical concerns, and to gain support for the study, the researcher shared the purpose of the study with the participating institutions. All participants were informed of how the information collected from their respective institutions would be used. Each institution was required to complete a voluntary consent form to participate in the study. The identity of each participating institutions was withheld. The researcher coded each institution using a unique coding system, and safeguarded the data collected to maintain its integrity. Participants were instructed of their right to decline participation or withdraw from the study at any time.

**Description of the Instruments**

Yin (1989) identifies six common sources of evidence for collecting data in a case study: documentation, archival records, interviews, direct observation, participant-observation, and physical artifacts. In this study, data were collected through multiple mediums including surveys and interviews, and both private and public documents were reviewed. First, the report findings from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges were examined. This report allowed the researcher to: (a) identify institutions with a non-compliant status for CS 3.3.1.1; (b) identify the extent
of their noncompliance; and (c) identify the conditions set by SACSCOC for the
institution to meet to return to full-accreditation status. Secondly, the institutions
response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 or Monitoring Report(s) to Comprehensive
Standard 3.3.1.1 was analyzed for the institution that provided these documents. In
addition, the institutions’ mission statements were also examined. Supplementary
archival records belonging to the institutions were reviewed including the organizational
charts and prior department structures. These documents, outlined in Table 13, provided
the researcher with required background information on the institutions.

Table 13

Description of Instruments

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Data Collection Source</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC</td>
<td>SACSCOC</td>
<td>Used to identify institutions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Member/Candidate/Applicant List 2013</td>
<td>(<a href="http://www.sacscoc.org">www.sacscoc.org</a>)</td>
<td>scheduled for reaffirmation during the 2011-2012 year</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACS COC Report Findings</td>
<td>SACSCOC</td>
<td>Used to identify institutions with a non-compliant status for CS 3.3.1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Institution’s Disclosure Statement</td>
<td>(<a href="http://www.sacscoc.org">www.sacscoc.org</a>)</td>
<td>Used to identify the extent of their noncompliance, and identify the sanction conditions set by SACSCOC for the institution to meet to return to full-accreditation status</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 13 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Data Collection Source</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Report Response</td>
<td>Institutions that agreed to share their reports</td>
<td>Used to examine how the institutions document IE related to student learning</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Institutions that agreed to share their reports</td>
<td>Used to examine how the institutions responded to a review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional Response</td>
<td>Institutions that agreed to share their reports or from the institution’s website</td>
<td>Used to examine how the institutions responded to a review finding and further documented IE related to student learning in response to a non-compliant finding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Mission</td>
<td>Review of Online Document</td>
<td>Used to verify the purpose of the institution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Organizational Chart</td>
<td>Review of Online Document</td>
<td>Used to determine how the institution's IE related departments are structured</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Web-based survey on Institutional Effectiveness &amp; Institution’s structure</td>
<td>Used to determine the participant’s views on, the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Telephone Semi-structured Interview with IE Personnel</td>
<td>Used to gain an in-depth understanding of the participant’s views on the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
A survey, created by the researcher, was administered to each institution electronically (see Appendix D). The survey contained both Likert-scale and open-ended questions. The questions were constructed to determine the participant’s views on, and perceived impact of each variable identified in this study.

To validate the data collected via the survey, the participants also engaged in a semi-structured follow-up interview. The interview served as a major source for gathering the information needed to understand the phenomenon (Yin, 1989; Creswell, 1994, 7007; Merriam, 1998). It also provided additional information based on the opinions of the interviewees (Creswell, 1994, 2007; Merriam, 1998). This interview format allowed for more flexibility, and permitted the researcher to respond to current conditions and emerging ideas (Yin, 1989; Merriam, 1998).

**Participants**

The final sample size consisted of seven institutions from four of the eleven states within the southern region. The participants at each institution were selected based on job function and subsequent responsibilities for their institution’s reaffirmation of accreditation process. The subjects’ respective titles, which varied from institution to institution, were intentionally omitted to ensure their anonymity. All of the participants are however involved in and/or responsible for assessing and evidencing institutional effectiveness at their respective institutions. Only institutions that completed both the survey and the follow-up interview were included in the study.
Table 14 provides a summary of the participants’ years of experience at their institution, in their current position in Institutional Effectiveness and Assessment, or a related field.

Table 14

*Participants' Years of Experience*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>Participant</th>
<th>Years at the Institution</th>
<th>Years in Current Position</th>
<th>Total Years of experience in Field or Related Field</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I-1</td>
<td>P-1</td>
<td>5 Years or Longer</td>
<td>Less than 5 Years</td>
<td>5 Years or Longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-2</td>
<td>P-2</td>
<td>5 Years or Longer</td>
<td>5 Years or Longer</td>
<td>15 Years or Longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-3</td>
<td>P-3</td>
<td>15 Years or Longer</td>
<td>Less than 5 Years</td>
<td>5 Years or Longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-4</td>
<td>P-4</td>
<td>20 Years or Longer</td>
<td>5 Years or Longer</td>
<td>10 Years or Longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-5</td>
<td>P-5</td>
<td>20 Years or Longer</td>
<td>Less than 5 Years</td>
<td>5 Years or Longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-6</td>
<td>P-6</td>
<td>15 Years or Longer</td>
<td>15 Years or Longer</td>
<td>25 Years or Longer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I-7</td>
<td>P-7</td>
<td>Less than 5 Years</td>
<td>Less than 5 Years</td>
<td>5 Years or Longer</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Data Collection Procedures**

To address concerns of construct validity and reliability, Yin’s (1989) three principles of data collection, (a) Using multiple sources of evidence, (b) creating a case study database, and (c) maintaining a chain of evidence, was employed in this research. To ensure internal validity, a triangulation approach was also used (Yin, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Sapsford & Jupp, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Data were collected through multiple sources including document analysis, interviews, and survey data collection.
Initially, the researcher identified key personnel in the planning, assessment, and institutional researcher office(s) at each of the participating universities. At least two persons were identified at each of the institutions. Depending on the structure of the institution, this individual selected serves in a vice president or a director role. A database of the contact persons was established, and the first contact from each institution received an initial letter of endorsement/introduction for the study. The letter clearly outlined the purpose and significance of the study, the setting for the study, and the rationale for selecting the sites. Additionally, a summary of the information and materials needed for the study was provided. The researcher administered the survey questions through a web-based survey tool. Prior to answering the survey questions, each participant was asked to provide consent to participate in the study and survey by selecting the “I agree to participate in this study” option.

The survey question served as a guide for the interview protocol. A number of questions asked on the survey were repeated during the interview to find convergence among information sources and establish internal validity (Creswell, 1994). Additional questions were asked to gain a greater understanding of each institution, and the phenomenon of evidencing institutional effectiveness. The researcher established an interview protocol prior to conducting the interviews. The protocol addressed (a) the purpose for the inquiry, (b) the anonymity of participants through the use of pseudonyms, and (c) logistics with regard to time, location, and number of interviews (Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). The protocol also helped improve the commutation between the interviewer and the interviewee, and ensured that each case participant underwent a
similar (if not the same) interview process (Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). The interviews were conducted anywhere from four days to three weeks after the survey was complete, therefore, responses from both the survey and the interviews were compared to verify and validate the participant responses. Questions asked on the survey were repeated during the interview. In addition, the researcher reviewed the survey responses prior to the interviews, and asked for clarification or elaboration on any responses that were vague or seemed unexpected in the sense that it did not match an opinion expressed in another part of the survey.

To ensure that external observers are able to follow the derivation of the study findings (construct validity) the researcher maintained a chain of evidence (Yin, 1989). A case study database was developed to store information collected throughout the study. All notes taken (hand written, audiotapes, typed) and evidence assembled was added to the database. A list of the dates, time, locations, and individuals involved was also included in the database for easy retrieval and division of the findings into major subjects/themes (Yin, 1989). This process aided the researcher in conducting an effective comparative analysis for each sites examined in the study. The database was kept in a secured location and was only accessible to the researcher. The researcher assumed a neutral position in the collection and storage of all data used in this study.

**Description of Data Analysis Methods**

The intent of this multi-site case study is to explain the phenomenon of institutional effectiveness and how it is impacted by the identified causal variables, therefore, the explanation-building data analysis method was used (Yin, 1989). With this
approach the case study data was analyzed by building an explanation about the case. The study goes further by applying the analytical strategy to each individual case and developing a cross-case analysis (Yin, 1989). The final explanation derived from the cross-case analysis; also following the theoretical propositions (Yin, 1989).

As suggested by Creswell (1994) the data collection and analysis occurred simultaneously in this study. The researcher also utilized an on-going data analysis method throughout the study (Yin, 1989). All data collected were entered in the database, reviewed, and as patterns or themes emerge the information was interpreted and categorized or coded, and then continuously reviewed to reduce the volume of information and generate an overall picture to explain the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998).

**Reliability and Validity**

It is important to establish the reliability and validity of any qualitative research. Reliability refers to the ability to replicate the results of a qualitative research study and the extent to which those results are constant over time. The validity of a qualitative research is dependent upon the rigor or trustworthiness of the research (Davies & Dodd, 2001; Guba & Lincoln, 1985)

To address concerns of construct validity and reliability in this study, the researcher used multiple sources of evidence, created a case study database and maintained a chain of evidence adhering to the three principles of data collection established by Yin (1989). Data were collected through multiple sources and a triangulation approach was employed to ensure internal validity (Yin, 1989; Creswell,
The replication of the study at multiple sites also served as a form of analytical triangulation, which helps enhance the validity and generalizability of the study (Yin, 2009).

To establish the external validity of the study, the researcher ensured that the sample represented the diversity of the population. The researcher included institutions that represent both Track A and Track B, 2-year and 4-year, and public and private not-for-profit institution. The sample also represented liberal arts and/or religious affiliated institutions that ranged in size from a small 2-year to a medium 4-year institutions, and degrees offered from associates to doctorate degree.

**Summary**

Chapter IV provides a rationale for the methods of inquiry used in this research. The characteristics of the qualitative paradigm, case study paradigm, and multi-site case study approached were outlined in this chapter. In addition, the procedures for collecting, recording and interpreting the information gather throughout the study were presented. This chapter also presents the strategic analytical methods used in the study. Identifying these procedures and research approaches was critical to the reliability and validity of this study.
CHAPTER V

ANALYSIS OF THE DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of how internal factors within an institution’s environment can impact its ability to evidence institutional effectiveness correlated with student learning. Evidence presented to demonstrate compliance with SACS Commission on Colleges Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 (Institutional Effectiveness and Program Outcomes) was used to guide this study. The institutions’ attainment of compliance with this SACSCOC standard was the bases for determining whether they are effective.

This qualitative inquiry takes on a multi-site case approach employing Yin’s (2009) cross-case analysis method. This methodology allowed the researcher to gain an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon in the context of the individual institution, and then compare the finding across institutions to provide a holistic description of the phenomenon based on the views and interpretations of the participants (Merriam, 1998; Creswell 1994, 2009). The researcher is one of few to examine this phenomenon through a study of this nature.

The following seven research questions were developed to guide this study:

RQ1: How is institutional effectiveness impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders?
RQ2: How do the institution’s planning, assessment, and research departments’ structures impact institutional effectiveness?

RQ3: How does the allocation of human and financial resources impact the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness?

RQ4: What role does the culture of the institution play in its ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness?

RQ5: How do the institution’s planning and assessment processes impact overall institutional effectiveness?

RQ6: What role does technology play in the institution’s ability to demonstrate that it engages in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process?

RQ7: How does the institution’s accreditation preparation period impact its overall effectiveness?

Data Analysis

Data collection and analysis in this study occurred simultaneously. The researcher utilized an on-going data analysis approach in which the data were continuously reviewed and coded to reduce the volume of information and generate an overall picture to explain the phenomenon (Marshall & Rossman, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Merriam, 1998).

The overall analysis was broken down into three phases. First, the data were analyzed for each institution. Using an open code approach, the institutions’ data were entered in the database, reviewed, and as patterns or themes emerged, the information
was categorized or coded. The second phase involved an in-depth cross case analysis with the researcher identifying relationships or connections among the existing codes from the institutions through axial coding. In the third phase, the researcher identified the core variables or factors presented across sites that essentially impacted the institution’s overall effectiveness.

The data used in this study were obtained through multiple collection methods including surveys, one-on-one interviews, and analysis of existing public and private documents. Documents classified as private (belonging to the institution) were documents that could only be reviewed if the institutions provided the researcher a copy

**Survey**

Electronic surveys were administered to all participants. The survey questions were divided into six sections to address each of the independent variables of the study. Questions 2-8 addressed institutional leadership and administration. Questions 9-12 looked at the institutional structure for planning, assessment, and research. The allocation of human, fiscal, and physical resources (support) and the use of technology in key IE areas were addressed in questions 13-18 and 19-26, respectively. Questions 27-39 cover instructional assessment practices, and questions 40-42 address the institutional accreditation period. Questions concerning institutional culture were embedded in each of the aforementioned areas.

**Interviews**

The semi-structured interview questions followed the same pattern as the survey, and were divided into six categories as well. A number of questions asked on the survey
were repeated during the interview. Some of the participants were asked to expand upon responses that required further explanation. In addition, new questions were also included on the interview protocol developed to ensure that each participant undergo a similar process.

The open-ended questions asked during the semi-structured interview allowed the researcher to probe the interviewees and gain additional insight by expounding upon ideas and concepts related to the research topic as they arise. The participants were given the option to conduct one-on-one interviews in-person, via Skype or via Telephone. All of the interviews were conducted via telephone and took about one hour to one hour and fifteen minutes. The interviews were recorded for accuracy and then transcribed for analysis.

**Document Analysis**

The mission statement of each institution was obtained via their website and reviewed to determine the stated purposes of each of the institutions. The structural setup for the institutional effectiveness related departments was examined through each institution's on-line organizational chart. The 2011-2012 SACSCOC Report Findings were used to identify institutions with a non-compliant status for Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1. Additionally, the SACSCOC Online Disclosure Statement was reviewed for the institutions classified as noncompliant with CS 3.3.1.1. This document identified the extent of the institution's noncompliance, and the sanction set by SACSCOC.
Each participating institution was also asked to share a copy of their response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 to examine how IE related student learning was documented at that institution. While many of the institutions did not provide a copy of their response report, the responses reviewed for those institutions that did provided valuable insight into the institutions’ processes and ability to evidence student learning.

One significant observation made in reviewing the initial response report from two institutions at different ends of the spectrum—that is, one institution was reaffirmed with no finding related to CS 3.3.1.1 and the other was sanctioned for CS 3.3.1.1—was the level of detail and supporting evidence provided by the institutions. The institution that was reaffirmed proved a detailed report that clearly articulated how the institution identified its expected outcomes related to student learning, assessed the extent to which those outcomes are achieved through its educational programs, and the programmatic improvement made based on the assessment results. In addition to explaining the process, this institution provided evidence documentation resulting from the implementation of their assessment activities. On the other hand, the response report to CS 3.3.1.1 from the other institution that was not as detailed. The report highlighted some of the processes but not necessarily the results. In addition, the institution’s report focused heavily on student achievement rather than student learning. As a result, this was reflected in the supporting evidence provided.

Some of the institutions also provided copies of additional response reports submitted to the Commission due to noncompliant findings in either the off-site or on-site reviews. These documents provided additional insight in the reaffirmation process but from the perspective of the reviewer. The reviewers’ responses provided the institutions
with clear and explicit information as to why they were considered noncompliant. In most instances, it was a lack of evidence to support the institutions’ documented processes.

**Case Study One (I-1)**

**Brief Introduction**

This case study was conducted on a private not-for-profit liberal arts degree granting institution, classified by SACSCOC as a Track A/Level II institution. This institution will henceforth be referred to as Institution 1 (I-1). I-1 is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a *Small Four-year, Highly Residential* institution, which means that the fall data reflected a full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment between 1,000–2,999 degree-seeking students, and at least 50% of undergraduates lived on campus, with a minimum of 80% attending full-time (Carnegie Foundation, 2013).

Institution 1 is a religious-affiliated institution committed to the integration of Christian values with a mission centered on providing quality education and fostering academic excellence among its students. I-1 is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award baccalaureate degrees.

**Data Collection and Review**

To increase the reliability and validity of this study, the researcher employed data triangulation and utilized multiple sources of data (Yin, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Sapsford & Jupp, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Gay et al, 2009). Data were obtained through the analysis
of (a) online public documents, (b) private institutional documents, (c) an on-line survey, and (d) a one-on-one semi-structured interview.

The SACSCOC Member/Candidate List for 2013, used to identify the institutions reviewed for reaffirmation in 2011-2012, and the SACSCOC 2011-2012 Report Findings, used to identify institutions in noncompliance with Comprehensive Standard (CS) 3.3.1.1, were obtained via the SACSCOC website. The participant from I-1 completed the on-line survey and took part in a semi-structured interview conducted via telephone. In addition, the mission and organizational chart for I-1 were obtained from the institution’s website.

Institution 1 was found noncompliant with CS 3.3.1.1; as a result, the SACSCOC disclosure statement regarding the status of I-1 was obtained from the accrediting agency’s website. Unfortunately, the institution did not provide a copy of its response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 submitted to SACSCOC via the compliance certification report, nor any monitoring reports submitted related to CS 3.3.1.1. Table 15 provides an overview of the data collection instruments used and analyzed for I-1.

Table 15

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Member/Candidate/ Applicant List 2013</td>
<td>Identified the institution as a member of the 2011-2012 reaffirmation class</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Report Findings</td>
<td>Identified institutions with a non-compliant status for CS 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 15 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Online Institution Disclosure Statement</td>
<td>Identified the extent of the Institution’s noncompliance, and identified the sanction conditions set by SACSCOC for the institution to meet to return to full-accreditation status</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Report Response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution documents IE related to student learning</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Monitoring Report Response(s) to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution responded to a review finding and further documented IE related to student learning in response to a non-compliant finding</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Mission</td>
<td>Verified the purpose of the institution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Organizational Chart</td>
<td>Used to determine how the institution’s IE related departments are structure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Determine the participant’s views on, the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Gain an in-depth understanding of the participant’s views on the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participating administrator from Institution 1 was asked to rate the importance of seven specific factors that could impact the institution’s ability to evidence effectiveness demarcated by student learning and achievement. Each factor was aligned with independent variables in this study. The factors were rated on a scale of 1 - 5 where
1 meant *Not at all Important*; 2 meant *Slightly Important*; 3 meant *Moderately Important*; 4 meant *Very Important*; and 5 meant *Extremely Important.* Table 16 provides an overview of opinions of Participant 1 (P-1) on the importance of these factors/variables. All responses from Participant 1 (P-1) were obtained from an interview conducted by the researcher on December 5, 2013.

**Table 16**

*Institution 1 - Rating of Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role that your institutional leaders play in supporting or facilitating your IE effort</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure of your institution’s planning, assessment, and institutional research departments</td>
<td>Moderately Important (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to Key IE areas (e.g. Planning, Assessment, IE, IR)</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culture of your institution in support of assessment, accountability and shared responsibility for IE related to student learning and achievement</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The application of technology to support your assessment and IE processes</td>
<td>Not at all Important (1)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your institution’s planning and assessment processes (i.e. evidencing IE through on-going assessment and continuous improvement)</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process</td>
<td>Moderately Important (3)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Analysis and Results

Institutional Leadership and Administration

RQ1: How is institutional effectiveness impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders?

Participant 1 confirms that institutional effectiveness is greatly impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders. P-1 categorized the role that leaders play in supporting or facilitating institutional effectiveness activities as “very important,” noting that “the institutional leaders have to be as involved in the assessment process as they expect faculty to be” for these processes to be effective. Nevertheless, it was reported that the leaders at this institution did not actively participate in assessment processes. Participant 1 also noted that some academic leaders lacked the expertise and or in-depth knowledge to provide guidance and governance for the assessment of IE.

According to P-1, employees are generally held accountable for the execution of assessment duties; “for faculty, assessment is now a part of the annual review and tenure and promotion processes.” However, Participant 1 explained that the accountability measures taken by the institution’s leaders is not the driving force behind faculty compliance but that “the major driver in keeping assessment alive is the will of the faculty to improve instruction.” Even with accountability measures in place, when asked to express a level of agreement with the statement that “campus leaders value and supported a culture of assessment at the institution” Participant 1 replied, “strongly disagree.” At this institution, a lack of leader involvement is identified as one of the biggest hindrance to adequately documenting effectiveness. According to P1, the institution’s top administrators see assessment as “something that has to be done rather
than something transformative in nature.” Adding that, although the leaders do not necessarily inhibit the process outright, they also do not provide any encouragement or incentive to increase constituent’s participation.

**Institutional Structure for Planning, Assessment and Research**

**RQ2:** How do the institution’s planning, assessment, and research departments’ structures impact institutional effectiveness?

At Institution 1, the planning assessment and institutional research functions are organized through a single office. I-1 centralized structure includes a department head (director) who reports to the president, a staff member responsible for assessment, a staff member responsible institutional research and an administrative assistant. Participant 1 considers the integration of these functions a key component in maintaining institutional effectiveness. When asked how the structure of the department impacts the institution’s ability to adequately assess and document IE, Participant 1 responded,

> Having an office that is in charge is vital to our ability to maintain an active assessment process. This gives the institution someone to monitor compliance and follow up with those that need to turn in their assessment plans and results.

**Institutional Allocation of Human, Fiscal, and Physical Resources in Key IE Areas**

**RQ3:** How does the allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources impact the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness?

According to Participant 1, the allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to key IE areas is a very important factor for demonstrating effectiveness. P-1 indicated that there is a direct correlation between having adequate resources and demonstrating
institutional effectiveness. While P-1 asserts that the department is adequately staffed to support the institution, it is also noted that there is a need for additional fiscal resources to support professional development in IE. Participant 1 posits that the institution would be more effective if both the staff in the IE department and the institution’s faculty were provided additional training, specifically related to institutional effectiveness and student learning assessment.

**Institutional Culture**

**RQ4:** What role does the culture of the institution play in its ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness?

Participant 1 asserts that a culture that supports assessment, accountability, and shared responsibility is a *very important* factor in the institution’s ability to demonstrate successfully institutional effectiveness. P-1 postulates two aspects that are needed to promote a culture of assessment and be successful. First, data collection and assessment has to be part of the general function and ongoing, and secondly, the leadership team needs to support and promote assessment related activities. These aspects are not prominent at I-1 and consequently, the assessment processes have not become ingrained in the institution’s culture. P-1 stated that “there is little top level interaction or guidance in assessing student learning.”

**Institutional Planning and Assessment Processes**

**RQ5:** How do the institution’s planning and assessment processes impact overall institutional effectiveness?
The institution’s planning and assessment process at Institution 1 is well defined. According to P-1, the faculty develops the program learning outcomes (PLOs) that are aligned with the department’s objective and the institution’s goals and objectives; the departments are expected to assess the PLOs annually, and provide the results to be used for improvement, to the IE department. However, these processes have not been fully implemented and, therefore, the impact has not been actualized. Because of the fact that Institution 1 planning and assessment processes were not implemented as prescribed, the institution labeled itself as noncompliant with Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1. Having a documented processes is extremely important, but as this institution proves, if it is not properly implemented or executed institutional effectiveness cannot be realized. Institution 1 has made a number of necessary changes since the review to improve its processes and get the needed results. P-1 stated that all assessment processes are now reviewed regularly and revised when necessary.

### Use of Technology in Key IE Areas

**RQ6:** What role does technology play in the institution’s ability to demonstrate that it engages in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process?

The application of technology to support activities related to assessment and institutional effectiveness was rated as *not at all important* by Participant 1. Reporting that the institution does utilize technology to streamline its planning and assessment processes, Participant 1 also notes that the institution’s system is user-friendly. However, according to P-1, prior to the review, most constituents did not submit the assessment
information as required. For this institution, the technology was not utilized as it was intended and therefore did not have a major impact on the department’s IE and assessment efforts.

**Institutional Accreditation Preparation Period**

RQ7: How does the institution’s accreditation preparation period impact its overall effectiveness?

While I-1 allocated 3 years to the reaffirmation process, P-1 noted that prior to this period the institution did not execute the assessment and documentation practices as described. As a result, the institution was not prepared to respond to the standard 3.3.1.1 in a manner that would be considered compliant. Three years is seen as an adequate amount of time for the reaffirmation process, however, as this case reveals, an institution cannot successfully document effectiveness if the assessment practices are not properly carried out and documented to support the institution’s claims prior to the reaffirmation.

**Gaps and Obstacles**

P-1 was asked to describe any gaps in the assessment process at Institution 1 along with any obstacles faced during the reaffirmation process. The primary obstacle was the institution’s leadership according to Participant 1. The leaders viewed assessment as something that just had to be done and failed to realize the value and transformative nature of assessment according to P-1. This resulted in a lack of involvement in and support for the institution’s assessment efforts that P-1 notes was reflected in the culture of the institution. Participant 1 also noted that the institutional leaders have to “respect the assessment process” of the institution.
Summary of Findings/Conclusion

This case study revealed the practices of an institution that failed to document its levels of effectiveness as it relate to student learning. While I-1 developed an institutional effectiveness strategy, the IE practices were not ingrained in the culture of the institution. The processes of measuring and documenting student learning and performance within the institution’s educational program were neither systemic nor ongoing, and consequently, Institution 1 identified itself as non-compliant with CS 3.3.1.1. This finding was echoed by the accrediting agency and the institution was denied reaffirmation of accreditation by SACSCOC. I-1 was placed on warning for a period of one year following the review.

Case Study Two (I-2)

Brief Introduction

This case study was conducted on a public liberal arts degree granting institution, classified by SACSCOC as a Track B/Level III institution. This institution will henceforth be referred to as Institution 2 (I-2). I-2 is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a Small Four-Year, Primarily Residential institution, which means that the full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment is between 1,000–2,999 degree-seeking students (based on the Fall enrollment data), and 25% -49% of the undergraduates living on campus, with a minimum of 50% attending full time (Carnegie Foundation, 2013).

Institution 2 mission is centered on creating an environment where students can attain the knowledge, skills, and disposition (KSD) needed to excel in a global environment. I-2 offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees, and its level III
ranking from SACSCOC indicates that the graduate degrees offered are at the master’s level.

**Data Collection and Review**

The researcher employed a triangulation method by collecting data through multiple sources to enhance the validity and reliability of the study (Yin, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Sapsford & Jupp, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). This included data collected through the analysis of online public documents, the analysis of private institutional documents, surveys, and interviews.

The SACSCOC Member/Candidate List for 2013, obtained from the accrediting agency’s website, was used to identify the institutions reviewed for reaffirmation in 2011-2012. The SACSCOC 2011-2012 Report Findings was used to identify institutions in noncompliance with Comprehensive Standard (CS) 3.3.1.1, and was also obtained via the SACSCOC website. The participant from I-2 completed the on-line survey and participated in a semi-structured interview conducted via telephone. In addition, a copy of the institution’s response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 submitted to SACSCOC via the compliance certification report was provided by the study participant. Institution 2 was found compliant with this standard and therefore did not have a disclosure statement or any monitoring reports related to this standard. The mission statement and organizational chart for I-2 was obtained from the institution’s website. An overview of the data collection instruments used and analyzed for this institution is provided in Table 17.
Table 17

*Documents Reviewed for Institution 2*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
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<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Member/Candidate/Applicant List 2013</td>
<td>Identified the institution as a member of the 2011-2012 reaffirmation class</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Report Findings</td>
<td>Identified institutions with a non-compliant status for CS 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Institution Disclosure Statement</td>
<td>Identified the extent of the Institution’s noncompliance, and identified the sanction conditions set by SACSCOC for the institution to meet to return to full-accreditation status</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Report Response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution documents IE related to student learning</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Monitoring Report Response(s) to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution responded to a review finding and further documented IE related to student learning in response to a non-compliant finding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Mission</td>
<td>Verified the purpose of the institution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
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<td>Institution’s Organizational Chart</td>
<td>Used to determine how the institution’s IE related departments are structure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Determine the participant’s views on, the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
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<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Gain an in-depth understanding of the participant’s views on the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a summation to the survey and interview, the participating administrator from Institution 2 was also asked to rate, the importance of seven specific factors on institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness related to student learning and achievement. Each factor coincide with the independent variables of this study and was rated on a scale of 1 - 5, where 1 meant \textit{Not at all Important}; 2 meant \textit{Slightly Important}; 3 meant \textit{Moderately Important}; 4 meant \textit{Very Important}; and 5 meant \textit{Extremely Important}. Table 18 provides an overview of the importance of these factors/variables from the perspective of Participant 2 (P-2). All responses from Participant 2 (P-2) were obtained from an interview conducted by the researcher on October 22, 2013.

Table 18

\textit{Institution 2 - Rating of Variables}

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role that your institutional leaders play in supporting or facilitating your IE effort</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure of your institution’s planning, assessment, and institutional research departments</td>
<td>Moderately Important (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to Key IE areas (e.g. Planning, Assessment, IE, IR)</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culture of your institution in support of assessment, accountability and shared responsibility for IE related to student learning and achievement</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 18 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The application of technology to support your assessment and IE processes</td>
<td>Moderately Important (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your institution’s planning and assessment processes (i.e. evidencing IE through on-going assessment and continuous improvement)</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process</td>
<td>Slightly Important (2)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis and Results**

**Institutional Leadership and Administration**

RQ1: How is institutional effectiveness impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders?

At Institution 2, the role that leaders play in supporting or facilitating institutional effectiveness activities is seen as “very important.” Leaders at this institution are said to value and support a culture of assessment. Participant 2 affirmed that institutional leaders provide guidance and governance for assessment of IE, and actively participate in assessment processes, but more importantly, they ensure that the responsible parties are held accountable for the execution of their assessment duties. According to P-2, “Leaders support assessment activities and assessment committees, and hold others accountable through contractual agreements.” P-2 also added that the institution engages in shared governance with assessment, and assessment responsibilities are made clear to all constituents. With this leadership model, one of support, involvement and
accountability, faculty members are more inclined to buy-in to the IE process according to Participant 2.

**Institutional Structure for Planning, Assessment and Research**

RQ2: How do the institution’s planning, assessment, and research departments’ structures impact institutional effectiveness?

Institution 2’s structure was described as centralized. The department includes the director and an individual dedicated to assessment, data analysis, and institutional research. The department is positioned under Academic Affairs in the organizational structure; however, the director maintains open communication with all institutional leaders. As the director of IE, P-2 is also involved in the academic processes at the institution, and serve on a number of committees responsible for making academic related decisions.

With over a decade of experience in the field, Participant 2 asserted that a centralized structure allows for a synergistic interaction between the planning, assessment, and institutional research units, which allow the department to adequately streamline the assessment and document IE across the institution.

**Institutional Allocation of Human, Fiscal, and Physical Resources in Key IE Areas**

RQ3: How does the allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources impact the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness?

To be successful at any job it is important to have the necessary resources for that reason, Participant 2 rated this factor/variable as *very important* asserting that the resources to coordinate and support assessment activities such as administrative support
(staff), facilities, and financial support at the institution are adequate. P-2 also stated that the leaders of the institution view resource allocation for this functional area as a “reasonable priority.” P-2 asserted that the 4-person office, which has someone dedicated to assessment, institutional research, and data analysis, is sufficient for meeting the institution’s needs. P-2 indicated that while adding an additional staff person would be ideal, having the current human resources with a staff person assigned to each area is part of what makes the department function well.

**Institutional Culture**

RQ4: What role does the culture of the institution play in its ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness?

Culture is seen as an “extremely important” factor in the institution’s ability to demonstrate successfully institutional effectiveness. Participant 2 asserts that a culture of on-going assessment (annual assessments), and accountability play a significant role in the IE process. At I-2, “all assessment processes are reviewed regularly and revised when necessary;” in addition, employees are held accountable for the execution of assessment duties for their respective programs. According to P-2,

All departments and schools must complete an annual program review in which they report on their assessment results from the previous year as they relate to their academic programs' student learning outcomes. Reports of actions and follow-ups are required. Deans and Chairs are responsible for the submission of their report. Curricular, budgetary, and personnel decisions are driven by the program reviews. Suggested changes and requests for additional resources are
reviewed by the executive vice chancellor for academic affairs and are discussed in cabinet meetings with the Chancellor.

The case study revealed two additional factors that should be a staple of the institutional culture to facilitate buy-in. The first is involvement by constituents. The requirements and the benefits of assessment are often not fully understood and consequently they are not entirely embraced. A lack of participation by key individuals or subject matter experts (SMEs) can hinder the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness. To ensure participation from the SMEs, I-2 provides "on-going training” on an annual basis. Here, the IE department provides group training opportunities, and when necessary, one-on-one training. In addition, the faculty members serve on a number of standing peer-assessment committees that allow them to assume ownership of (assessment) and provide peer review feedback to colleagues on the effectiveness of assessment activities. P-2 notes that most constituents at the institution understand the institutional assessment processes and practices. The second factor is establishing a constructive and timely feedback system. I-2 views feedback as an essential component in identifying IE, reporting that assessment results are shared in useful forms and discussed widely with the appropriate constituents. At this institution, along with general assessment reports, newsletters, and web postings, one of the major sources for providing feedback is through the peer-assessment committees. The assessments are structured through the use of established rubrics, which allow the committees to provide systematized and well-thought-out feedback to the responsible parties. P-2 also noted
that the department has a presence on campus and good relationship with many of the constituents.

**Institutional Planning and Assessment Processes**

RQ5: How do the institution’s planning and assessment processes impact overall institutional effectiveness?

The institution’s planning and assessment processes for evidencing IE through ongoing assessment and continuous improvement was described as *extremely important* and played a significant role for this institution overall effectiveness. P-2 explicated that assessment of student learning at I-2 is on-going,

There are myriad means (for assessing student learning), both direct and indirect- portfolios, standardized tests (e.g., MFT, Proficiency Profiles), embedded assessments, exit interviews, alumni surveys, employer surveys, CIRP, NSSE, value-added assessments, capstone assessments. Data from these instruments/sources are tied to specific student learning outcomes and reported annually.

P-2 also added that levels of effectiveness is assessed at the institution through established rubrics that are reviewed annually, as well as periodically to identify “trends over time,” and improvements in institutional effectiveness. These practices, according to Participant 2, made the institution’s efforts to demonstrated compliance with SACSCOC IE standards, including Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1, a “fairly easy” process.
Use of Technology in Key IE Areas

RQ6: What role does technology play in the institution’s ability to demonstrate that it engages in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process?

At Institution 2, technology is used to streamline the assessment process. They employ an institution-wide assessment and reporting software used for planning at all levels, and assessment of student learning among other thing. This system is widely integrated within and throughout the institution and is used to align institutional goals, plans, assessment efforts and improvement strategies. The software is described as user-friendly and is maintained within the IE department. The IE department also provides users training on an on-going basis to ensure user participation. Despite the software, system’s many applications and wide use, P-2 rates the application of technology to support the assessment and IE processes at a 3 (moderately important) on a scale of 1-5.

Institutional Accreditation Preparation Period

RQ7: How does the institution's accreditation preparation period impact its overall effectiveness?

While I-2 allocated 3 years to the reaffirmation process, P-2 noted that the planning and preparation for the reaffirmation was on-going. According to P-2, the institution maintained a culture of assessment, a practice that made for a seamless review process. Consequently, the amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process was rated as *slightly important* by Participant 2.
Gaps and Obstacles

P-2 was asked to describe any gaps in the assessment process at I-2 along with any obstacles faced during the reaffirmation process. While no significant obstacles were identified during the review process, P-2 did note that the longitudinal analysis of assessment results is one area where the institution fell short. In addition, determining the validity of assessment results for programs with smaller enrollment numbers, and assessing the value of the programs (program cost analysis) were also gaps in the assessment process identified by P-2.

Summary of Findings/Conclusion

This case study revealed the practices of an institution that has successfully documented its levels of effectiveness linked to student learning. Assessment of student learning at this institution is an on-going process designed to identify levels of effectiveness, as well as assist faculty members in identifying areas for improvement to enhance the quality of the academic programs. The assessment processes involved all key constituents, but more importantly, was adequately supported by the institution’s senior leaders who played a crucial role in ensuring that all responsible parties were held accountable. P-2 attributes the fact that I-2 had no findings by SACSCOC related to CS 3.3.1.1 and the “exemplary” rating of the institution’s response to these factors.

Drawing from P-2 responses to the survey, interview questions, and ranking of the seven factors/variables, one can postulate that the institutional culture, assessment processes, leadership, and allocation of resources, were essential to the process of documenting institutional effectiveness.
Case Study Three (I-3)

Brief Introduction

This case study was conducted on a public degree granting institution, classified by SACSCOC as a Track B/Level VI institution. This institution will henceforth be referred to as Institution 3 (I-3). I-3 is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a “medium four-year, primarily nonresidential” institution, which means that based on the Fall enrollment data, the full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment is between 3,000–9,999 degree-seeking students, with fewer than 25% of the undergraduates living on campus, and/or fewer than 50% of the students attend full time (Carnegie Foundation, 2013).

The mission of Institution 3 is centered on providing academic and research programs that prepare students to become change agents in our global society. I-3 offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees, and its classification as a Level VI institution by SACSCOC means that it offers four or more doctoral degrees.

Data Collection and Review

Data for this study were collected utilizing multiple mediums, including online public documents from SACSCOC and the institution, an electronic survey, and a semi-structured interview. This process of data triangulation was used to enhance the validity and reliability of the study (Yin, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Sapsford & Jupp, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009).

The SACSCOC Member/Candidate List for 2013, used to identify the institutions reviewed for reaffirmation in 2011-2012, and the SACSCOC 2011-2012 Report Findings - used to identify institutions in noncompliance with Comprehensive Standard (CS)
3.3.1.1, were obtained via the SACSCOC website. The participant from I-3 completed an on-line survey, and participated in a semi-structured interview conducted via telephone.

In addition, the mission and organizational charts for I-3 were obtained from the institution’s website. Unfortunately, the institution was not able to provide a copy of its response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 submitted to SACSCOC via the compliance certification report. Furthermore, Institution 3 was found compliant with CS 3.3.1.1 and therefore did not have an online disclosure statement or any monitoring reports related to this standard. Table 19 provides an overview the data collection instruments used and analyzed for this institution.

Table 19

*Documents Reviewed for Institution 3*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Member/Candidate/</td>
<td>Identified the institution as a member of the 2011-2012 reaffirmation class</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Applicant List 2013</td>
<td>2011-2012 reaffirmation class</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Report Findings</td>
<td>Identified institutions with a noncompliant status for CS 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Institution Disclosure Statement</td>
<td>Identified the extent of the Institution’s noncompliance, and identified the sanction conditions set by SACSCOC for the institution to meet to return to full-accreditation status</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 19 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Report Response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution documents IE related to student learning</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Monitoring Report</td>
<td>Examined how the institution responded to a review finding and further documented IE related to student learning in response to a non-compliant finding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Mission</td>
<td>Verified the purpose of the institution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Organizational Chart</td>
<td>Used to determine how the institution’s IE related departments are structure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Determine the participant’s views on, the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Gain an in-depth understanding of the participant’s views on the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant 3 (P-3) was asked to rate the importance of the impact of seven specific factors on institution’s ability to prove effectiveness connected to student learning and achievement. Each factor coincide with the independent variables of this study and was rated on a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 meant Not at all Important; 2 meant Slightly Important; 3 meant Moderately Important; 4 meant Very Important; and 5 meant Extremely Important. An overview of the importance of these factors/variables from the perspective of Participant 3 are provided in Table 20. All responses from Participant 3 (P-3) were obtained from an interview conducted by the researcher on October 28, 2013.
Table 20

_Institution 3 - Rating of Variables_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role that your institutional leaders play in supporting or facilitating your IE effort</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure of your institution’s planning, assessment, and institutional research departments</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to Key IE areas (e.g. Planning, Assessment, IE, IR)</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culture of your institution in support of assessment, accountability and shared responsibility for IE related to student learning and achievement</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The application of technology to support your assessment and IE processes</td>
<td>Moderately Important (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your institution’s planning and assessment processes (i.e. evidencing IE through on-going assessment and continuous improvement)</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

_Analysis and Results_

_Institutional Leadership and Administration_

_RQ1:_ How is institutional effectiveness impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders?

At Institution 3, the role that leaders play in supporting or facilitating institutional effectiveness activities is seen as _very important_. Participant 3 describes the institution’s
model for leader involvement in assessment as one that works well, noting that it “allows for excellent flow of information and open communication.” P-3 explained that at Institution 3 leaders provide guidance and governance for assessment of IE, and actively participate in assessment processes. Explicating the senior administrators’ roles, Participant 3 stated,

The President has actually reviewed every Academic Area assessment plan. It is a part of the review of the Budget Hearing cycle. Areas have to demonstrate how their assessment plans are tied to their budgets and explain Action Plans associated with each Goal. The Provost heads the Assessment Committee. He meets annually (or biannually) with the Deans and Department Chairs to review assessment processes and the state of student learning. The Deans work with their schools Assessment Coordinators and the department chairs to monitor and review goals, metrics, targets and findings. They have the final review of assessment plans measurements prior to the information being shared with Provost and President.

According to Participant 3, institutional leaders ensure that the responsible parties are held accountable for the execution of their respective duties. P-3 also notes that because of this system, the institution has no units/departments that have fail to comply with the assessment and reporting requirements. Further noting that the support from senior administrators helps to facilitate greater user buy-in, P-3 maintains that, “you have to have administrator that care enough to support the assessment process. Without the support of the President and Provost we cannot successfully gather information”
Institutional Structure for Planning, Assessment and Research

RQ2: How do the institution’s planning, assessment, and research departments’ structures impact institutional effectiveness?

Participant 3 views the structure of the IE related areas as very important, and explains that the institution’s current structure positively impacts IE. Participant 3 notes that “this office is a part of the Central Administration and reports directly to the Provost’s Office.” Describing the institution’s structure as mostly centralized, P-3 explains that the academic assessment plans are prepared by the departments’ assessment coordinators, who “gather and assemble the assessment plans” while the Assessment, Planning and Effectiveness office review the plan and makes necessary recommendations.

Institutional Allocation of Human, Fiscal, and Physical Resources in Key IE Areas

RQ3: How does the allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources impact the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness?

Participant 3 rated the allocation of human, fiscal, and physical resources to Key IE areas as very important, and asserted that this is a priority for the leaders of the institution. However, P-3 also adds that the department is in need of additional support in staffing to execute effectively the department’s functions. With four staff members; the director, and person responsible for assessment, institutional research and data analysis, P-3 would ideally like to add 2 staff members.
Institutional Culture

RQ4: What role does the culture of the institution play in its ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness?

Participant 3 asserts that having a supportive culture of assessment, accountability, and shared responsibility is a very important factor in the institution’s ability to demonstrate successfully institutional effectiveness. This case study revealed a number of excellent practices that the institution used to promote a culture of assessment that facilitates the successful documentation of its levels of effectiveness. First, while employees are held accountable for the execution of assessment duties for their respective programs and activities, the IE department focuses on ensuring that the benefits of engaging in these practices are understood. P-3 explained that “user buy-in is established less through punitive actions and accreditation, and more through helping departments understand the importance and benefits of engaging in assessment.” Secondly, P-3 noted that feedback is provided to all constituents on assessment activities, and assessment results are widely communicated on a regular basis. At I-3, assessment results are used to identify areas for improvements and are tied to budget resource allocations.

While it was stated that most constituents understand the institutional assessment processes and practices, and the importance of assessment, P-3 added that the institution does not have a completely clear culture of collaboration and shared responsibility. P-3 stated,

When I think of the shared culture, I think of everyone taking ownership, and I don’t see necessarily that everyone has ownership of it. Everyone does their
part, but as far as it being ingrained into the institution, and everyone recognizing that it something they should do without prompting from other areas, that’s the part that could be done better.

With a supportive administration, and a structured system of reviews and feedback, P-3 adds that the overall level of buy-in has increased.

### Institutional Planning and Assessment Processes

**RQ5:** How do the institution’s planning and assessment processes impact overall institutional effectiveness?

The institution’s planning and assessment processes for evidencing IE is seen as an extremely important factor. P-3 confirmed that the institution’s assessment processes are on-going and implemented across the campus. Having set internal processes to examine the departments on a regular basis, reviewing the information provided (assessment plans and results), and providing feedback are component of this institution’s process and have positively impacted the institution’s overall ability to evidence its effectiveness.

### Use of Technology in Key IE Areas

**RQ6:** What role does technology play in the institution’s ability to demonstrate that it engages in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process?

At Institution 3, technology is used to streamline assessment and IE processes. The assessment software is used for institution-wide planning, assessment, and report generation. P-3 notes that the IE department manages which permits constituents
continuous access to their assessment information for planning and decision making. P-3 views the application of technology to support the assessment and IE processes as moderately important factor, and rates the institution’s current system as user-friendly.

**Institutional Accreditation Preparation Period**

RQ7: How does the institution’s accreditation preparation period impact its overall effectiveness?

According to P-3, the amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process is extremely important, but what’s more important is maintaining a culture of assessment and continuous reviews. Institution 3 dedicated three years to the reaffirmation process, which was viewed as an adequate amount of time to allocate. However, P-3 stated that the planning and preparation for the reaffirmation needs to be done on a consistent/annual basis. Unfortunately, this was not always properly carried out at I-3. After being cited for lack of documentation for CS 3.3.1.1 during the institution’s fifth-year review, the institution made a number of changes. These changes led to a compliant status in the 10-year reaffirmation review.

**Gaps and Obstacles**

Participant 3 was asked to describe any gaps in the assessment process at I-3 along with any obstacles faced during the reaffirmation process. According to P-3, changes in the personnel resulted in gaps in the assessment process prior to the implementation of a centralized tracking system for assessment. P-3 reported that convincing constituents, mainly nonacademic, to connect continuously assessment results and planning efforts was also an area of concern. One obstacle that P-3 stated that the
institution faced was convincing its faculty members that assessment is part of the regular process of ensuring students are learning, and not an additional burden placed on them for assessment.

**Summary of Findings/Conclusion**

This case study revealed the practices of an institution that has successfully documented its levels of effectiveness linked to student learning and achievement. At I-3, assessment of student learning is an on-going process and results are used to continuously improve the quality of the academic programs. These processes have helped the institution improve its ability to document IE related to student learning.

The assessment processes at I-3 are supported by the institution’s leaders which is a vital factor that not only facilitates better buy-in by constituents, but also promotes a culture conducive to evidencing institutional effectiveness according to P-3. In addition, the IE staff members are committed to serving as a resource for the departments, providing needed data, and proving feedback to aid in improvement efforts and overall effectiveness. Institution 3 successfully documented it levels of effectiveness related to student learning and accordingly, had no finding with CS 3.3.1.1.

**Case Study Four (I-4)**

**Brief Introduction**

This case study was conducted on a private not-for-profit liberal arts degree granting institution. This institution will henceforth be referred to as Institution 4 (I-4). I-4 is classified by SACSCOC as a Track A/Level II institution. The Carnegie Foundation classifies Institution 4 as a *Small Two-Year* institution based on its size and
setting, but the institution’s level is listed as 4-Year or above based on its Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) Institutional Characteristics (Carnegie Foundation, 2013).

Institution 4 is a religious affiliated institution committed to providing student a comprehensive liberal arts education integrated with faith-based experiences both in and outside of the classroom. I-4 is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award baccalaureate degrees.

Data Collection and Review

To enhance the validity and reliability of the study, the researcher employed a triangulation method and collected data from multiple sources (Yin, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Sapsford & Jupp, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). This included data collected through the analysis of online public documents, the analysis of private institutional documents, survey responses, and an interview.

The SACSCOC Member/Candidate List for 2013, obtained from the SACSCOC website, was used to identify the institutions reviewed for reaffirmation in 2011-2012. In addition, the SACSCOC 2011-2012 Report Findings, also obtained via the SACSCOC website, was used to identify institutions in noncompliance with Comprehensive Standard (CS) 3.3.1.1. The participant from I-4 completed the on-line survey and took part in a semi-structured interview conducted via telephone.

While the institution’s initial response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 was not provided by the study participant, a copy of the institution’s monitoring response report was. Institution 4 was not sanctioned for CS 3.3.1.1 and therefore did not have a
disclosure statement on the SACSCOC website. The mission statement and organizational chart for I-4 were obtained from the institution’s website. Table 21 provides an overview the data collection instruments used and analyzed for this institution.

Table 21

Documents Reviewed for Institution 4

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Member/Candidate/Applicant List 2013</td>
<td>Identified the institution as a member of the 2011-2012 reaffirmation class</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Report Findings</td>
<td>Identified institutions with a non-compliant status for CS 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Institution Disclosure Statement</td>
<td>Identified the extent of the Institution’s noncompliance, and identified the sanction conditions set by SACSCOC for the institution to meet to return to full-accreditation status</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Report Response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution documents IE related to student learning</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Monitoring Report Response(s) to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution responded to a review finding and further documented IE related to student learning in response to a non-compliant finding</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Mission</td>
<td>Verified the purpose of the institution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Organizational Chart</td>
<td>Used to determine how the institution’s IE related departments are structure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 21 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Determine the participant’s views on, the</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Gain an in-depth understanding of the</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>participant’s views on the perceived impact of</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>each variable on IE</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participating administrator from Institution 4 was also asked to rate the importance of the impact of seven specific factors on institutional effectiveness. These factors were rated on a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 meant Not at all Important; 2 meant Slightly Important; 3 meant Moderately Important; 4 meant Very Important; and 5 meant Extremely Important. Each of the factors coincides with the independent variables of this study. An overview of the importance of these factors/variables from the perspective of Participant 4 (P-4) are provided in Table 22. All responses from Participant 4 (P-4) were obtained from an interview conducted by the researcher on October 29, 2013.

Table 22

Table 22 - Rating of Variables

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role that your institutional leaders play in</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>supporting or facilitating your IE effort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure of your institution’s planning,</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>assessment, and institutional research departments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 22 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to Key IE areas (e.g. Planning, Assessment, IE, IR)</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culture of your institution in support of assessment, accountability and shared responsibility for IE related to student learning and achievement</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The application of technology to support your assessment and IE processes</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your institution’s planning and assessment processes (i.e. evidencing IE through on-going assessment and continuous improvement)</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis and Results**

**Institutional Leadership and Administration**

RQ1: How is institutional effectiveness impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders?

The role that leaders play in supporting or facilitating institutional effectiveness activities is seen as *very important* at this institution. Participant 4 explained that institutional assessment efforts were *haphazard* just a few years ago because the institution lacked leaders’ support. P-4 also noted that this lack of support was reflected in the institution’s prior report findings of noncompliance. P-4 noted feeling uncomfortable in the position having to work without the leaders’ support. However,
Participant 4 affirmed that at present the institutional leaders “value and support a culture of assessment.” The president and associate vice president actively participate in assessment processes and provide guidance and governance for assessment of IE at Institution 4. According to P-4, “leadership and their involvement and understanding of assessment makes all the difference.” Furthermore, employees are also held accountable for the execution of their assessment duties. Participant 4 provided details about the assessment requirements at I-4, noting that,

It is an expectation that each unit with a budget complete an assessment plan and provides the findings. A full report of both administrative and academic outcomes is produced annually, and we have an Assessment Day in early fall. If a director does not complete a plan, his/her supervisor meets with him/her and ensures one is completed ASAP.

**Institutional Structure for Planning, Assessment and Research**

RQ2: How do the institution’s planning, assessment, and research departments’ structures impact institutional effectiveness?

Institution 4 has centralized structure that includes the Vice President, and 2 additional personnel; one individual dedicated to data analysis, and the other to institutional research. The vice president reports directly to president’s office and also works directly with vice president for academic affairs. P-4 rates the institutional structure of the IE related areas as *very important*, adding that a centralized structure “works well for the IE processes.” At this institution, planning (general and strategic), assessment, and institutional research are all managed from this central office.
Institutional Allocation of Human, Fiscal, and Physical Resources in Key IE Areas

RQ3: How does the allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources impact the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness?

Having adequate resources is an extremely important factor for this institution. According to P-4, the resources provided to the department make it possible for the IE staff to adequately carry out their responsibilities in terms of planning, assessment and institutional research. While Participant 4 asserts that the institution’s resources in terms of technology and facilities are adequate, this participant also noted that ideally, there is a need for additional financial resources to support at least one additional personnel. According to P-4, adding an additional staff person to the current staff would allow for greater involvement in assisting individuals to assess their programs, completing quality reviews, and providing feedback to improve overall quality and use of data.

Institutional Culture

RQ4: What role does the culture of the institution play in its ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness?

The institution’s ability to achieve and demonstrate its levels of effectiveness is heavily dependent upon the institutional culture. Participant 4 asserts that a culture of assessment, accountability, and shared responsibility for IE and student learning is an extremely important factor. According to P-4, the institution’s shift in culture is what has aided them in properly evidencing their levels of effectiveness in the area of student learning and achievement. Participant 4 explicated that the institution’s “culture of sharing and openness makes a big difference” as constituents can now see what each
department is doing, and use what they have learned to improve other programs. P-4 confirms that an important part of their culture is providing feedback and involving constituents in the review process, adding that this increases constituents’ understanding of assessment and overall faculty buy-in and support of assessment efforts. In addition, Participant 4 posits that increased accountability, established by tying budget allocations to assessment and application of results, has also enhanced the institution’s ability to adequately document their levels of effectiveness. Another important aspect of the institution’s culture that greatly impacts the assessment efforts and overall IE is the established relationship and rapport the vice president has formed with the campus constituents. Participant 4 noted that having established good, long-lasting relationships with the faculty and staff helps increase their support, and the institution’s ability to document its overall effectiveness.

Institutional Planning and Assessment Processes

RQ5: How do the institution’s planning and assessment processes impact overall institutional effectiveness?

The institution’s planning and assessment processes is one of the most important factors in determining and documenting IE. At I-4, assessment efforts are on-going and fully implemented across the institution. P-4 affirms that assessment results are reviewed regularly and revised when necessary, but more importantly, assessment results are also shared publicly and used to improve academic programs: "Each fall, we have an Assessment Day where departments share their findings, engage in discussing, and then identify common outcomes to tackle for the upcoming year based on findings."
Participant 4 confirms that the assessment processes are very important to the institution’s ability to evidence IE related to student learning, but it is sometimes challenging: P-4 noted, "assessment is tedious, and therefore an obstacle in itself. The most challenging part is identifying substantial areas that have findings that we act on in order to improve SLOs."

Use of Technology in Key IE Areas

RQ6: What role does technology play in the institution’s ability to demonstrate that it engages in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process?

Institution 4 employs technology to streamline the assessment process. However, because the institution uses multiple software programs to carry out different planning and assessment related tasks, the technology in some ways makes the process a bit convoluted and time consuming. P-4 noted that while each software works well for its intended purpose, the preference would be to employ a software that “combines the assessment, administrative report requirements, and accreditation processes for the institution” to reduce some of the current redundancy. P-4 believes that the application of technology to support the assessment and IE processes is very important to the institution.

Institutional Accreditation Preparation Period

RQ7: How does the institution's accreditation preparation period impact its overall effectiveness?

The amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process was seen as very important by Participant 4. Institution 4 allocated approximately 18 months to the
reaffirmation process. However, the actual planning and preparation, as it relates to assessment, was on-going, and seen as the most tedious aspect of the process, but also the most beneficial.

**Gaps and Obstacles**

One major area in the assessment process that Participant 4 would like to improve upon is the ability to provide more assistance to faculty and feedback on assessment plans and results. P-4 believes that hiring an additional person to assume some of the assessment duties would allow them to address this gap. Participant 4 stated that another obstacle was having the subject matter experts determine which assessment findings are substantial enough to act upon. Depending on the scope and nature of finding, a decision is made by the department on how best to move forward.

**Summary of Findings/Conclusion**

During the reaffirmation, the Off-Site Committee requested that Institution 4 provide additional detailed information to verify assessment of its degree programs in response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1. I-4 was required to submit a monitoring report to support the assessment efforts of the institution’s academic programs. The institution submitted its monitoring report, which adequately documented the degree to which the student learning outcomes (SLOs) were achieved, and the institution’s application of assessment results to improve the degree programs. Consequently, Institution 4 was reaffirmed.

Similar to other institutions that are found compliant with CS 3.3.1.1, assessment of student learning at this institution is an on-going process that involves the institution’s
constituents, and is adequately supported by the institution’s senior leaders. These factors played a major role in the institution’s ability to adequately document its levels of effectiveness demarcated by student learning, and consequently resulted in the institution’s reaffirmation.

**Case Study Five (I-5)**

**Brief Introduction**

This case study was conducted on a public Associate degree granting institution, classified by SACSCOC as a Track A/Level II institution. This institution will henceforth be referred to as Institution 5 (I-5). I-5 is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a *Large, Two-Year* institution, which means that based on the fall enrollment data, the full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment is between 5,000–9,999 degree-seeking students (Carnegie Foundation, 2013).

The mission of Institution 5 is to provide an environment rich in quality and innovative instruction, where all of its students can excel. I-5 is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award associate degrees.

**Data Collection and Review**

Using a data triangulation approach, the researcher collected data through multiple mediums. Data collection methods included the analysis of online public documents, the analysis of private institutional documents, an online survey, and a semi-structured interview. This approach was selected to enhance the validity and reliability of
The SACSCOC Member/Candidate List and the SACSCOC 2011-2012 Report Findings were obtained via the SACSCOC website. The SACSCOC Member/Candidate List was used to identify the institutions reviewed for reaffirmation in 2011-2012, and the SACSCOC 2011-2012 Report Findings was used to identify institutions in noncompliance with Comprehensive Standard (CS) 3.3.1.1. The participant from I-5 completed the on-line survey and took part in a semi-structured interview conducted via telephone. In addition, a copy of the institution’s Focus Report in response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1, submitted to SACSCOC after the off-site review, was provided by the study participant. The institution’s initial response to CS 3.3.1.1 and Response Report to the visiting Committee were obtained from the institution’s reaffirmation website and reviewed as part of the study. Institution 5 was not sanctioned for Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 and therefore did not have a disclosure statement. The mission statement and organizational chart for I-5 was obtained from the institution’s website. Table 23 provides an overview the data collection instruments used and analyzed for this institution.

Table 23

*Documents Reviewed for Institution 5*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Member/Candidate/Applicant List 2013</td>
<td>Identified the institution as a member of the 2011-2012 reaffirmation class</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 23 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Report Findings</td>
<td>Identified institutions with a non-compliant status for CS 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Institution Disclosure Statement</td>
<td>Identified the extent of the Institution’s noncompliance, and identified the sanction conditions set by SACSCOC for the institution to meet to return to full-accreditation status</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Report Response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution documents IE related to student learning</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Focus Report for CS 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution responded to a review finding and further documented IE related to student learning in response to a non-compliant finding</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Response Report to the Visiting Committee for CS 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Verified the purpose of the institution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Mission</td>
<td>Used to determine how the institution’s IE related departments are structure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Organizational Chart</td>
<td>Determine the participant’s views on, the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Gain an in-depth understanding of the participant’s views on the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Identified the institution as a member of the 2011-2012 reaffirmation class</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
As a summation to the survey and interview, the participating administrator from Institution 5 was also asked to rate the importance of the impact of seven specific factors on institutional effectiveness. Each factor coincide with the independent variables of this study and was rated on a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 meant *Not at all Important*; 2 meant *Slightly Important*; 3 meant *Moderately Important*; 4 meant *Very Important*; and 5 meant *Extremely Important*. Table 24 provides an overview of the importance of these factors/variables from the perspective of Participant 5 (P-5). All responses from Participant 5 (P-5) were obtained from an interview conducted by the researcher on November 25, 2013.

Table 24

*Institution 5 - Rating of Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role that your institutional leaders play in supporting or facilitating your IE effort</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure of your institution’s planning, assessment, and institutional research departments</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to Key IE areas (e.g. Planning, Assessment, IE, IR)</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culture of your institution in support of assessment, accountability and shared responsibility for IE related to student learning and achievement</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The application of technology to support your assessment and IE processes</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 24 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your institution’s planning and assessment processes (i.e. evidencing IE through on-going assessment and continuous improvement)</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis and Results**

**Institutional Leadership and Administration**

RQ1: How is institutional effectiveness impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders?

Participant 5 stated that the role that leaders play in supporting or facilitating institutional effectiveness activities is *extremely important*, rating this factor as a 5 on a scale of 1-5. However, P-5 asserts that leaders at this institution do not actively participate in the assessment processes, nor do they provide adequate guidance and governance for assessment of Institutional Effectiveness (IE). Participant 5 also added that employees are not held accountable for the execution of assessment duties for their respective programs and activities, stating that “there are no real consequences for not completing assessment requirements.” When asked to identify roles that the institution’s senior leaders should take on to ensure that IE is properly assessed and documented, Participant 5 identified four specific roles for the leader of this institution: (a) Leaders should be more vocal about the importance of the assessment processes; (b) Leader
should participate in the meeting and assessment/IE activities; (c) Leaders should support the IE staff in their efforts; and (d) Leaders must hold faculty and staff accountable.

**Institutional Structure for Planning, Assessment and Research**

RQ2: How do the institution’s planning, assessment, and research departments’ structures impact institutional effectiveness?

Institution 5 has a centralized structure, where planning, assessment, institutional research, and institutional effectiveness efforts are all coordinated or managed by a single department. The unit reports directly to the president. Participant 5 asserted that the structure of these IE related functions is *extremely important* and a centralized structure works best. However, even with a centralized structured, and no levels of accountability, the IE department is at the mercy of academic units and whether or not they complete the program assessment requirements, according to P-5.

**Institutional Allocation of Human, Fiscal, and Physical Resources in Key IE Areas**

RQ3: How does the allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources impact the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness?

Participant 5 views the allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to Key IE areas as a vital factor to the institution’s ability to demonstrate its levels of effectiveness. Nevertheless, this is also identified as an area of deficiency for Institution 5. According to P-5, the resources available are “not adequate” to carry out the functions of the department. P-5 adds that there is a need for greater financial support and additional staffing in this area. The shortage of resources makes it difficult to address the institution’s IE concerns according to P-5.
Institutional Culture

RQ4: What role does the culture of the institution play in its ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness?

Culture is also viewed by Participant 5 as an extremely important factor in the institution’s ability to successfully demonstrate its levels of effectiveness. In describing the culture of the institution, Participant 5 asserted that there is not a clear culture of collaboration and shared responsibility within the institution. Furthermore, goals, including learning outcomes, are not clearly articulated by programs. Participant 5 stated that “assessment is seen as something done only for accreditation” and it is also viewed as a task forced upon constituents.

According to P-5, most constituents do not understand the institutional assessment processes and practices, which make it difficult to encourage faculty participation in most assessment activities. Participant 5 added that the response rate to IE and assessment related request is about 20% for the institution, which comes as a result of sending constant reminders. With an institutional culture that does not support assessment, nor a shared responsibility or levels of accountability, P-5 reveals that the assessment results do not provide convincing evidence that the institution is achieving its mission and student learning outcomes.

Institutional Planning and Assessment Processes

RQ5: How do the institution’s planning and assessment processes impact overall institutional effectiveness?
Having an effective planning and assessment processes in place is an essential component to evidencing the institution’s levels of effectiveness. Participant 5 agrees with this assertion, stating that the institution’s planning and assessment processes for evidencing IE through on-going assessment and continuous improvement is an extremely important factor. However, as the findings for this institution revealed, having the processes in place is just half of the equation. The actual implementation or IE practices, for assessing the student learning outcomes, analyzing the results and using the results to improve the degree programs, which is where Institution 5 fell short, is the other half.

**Use of Technology in Key IE Areas**

RQ6: What role does technology play in the institution’s ability to demonstrate that it engages in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process?

While Participant 5 rated “the application of technology to support the institution’s assessment and IE processes” at a 5, *extremely important*, on a scale of 1-5, Institution 5 did not use any tailored assessment software to streamline the assessment processes. Using programs in the Microsoft Office Suite (i.e. Word and Excel), the department did however create specific templates for constituents to provide assessment results in a uniformed way.

**Institutional Accreditation Preparation Period**

RQ7: How does the institution’s accreditation preparation period impact its overall effectiveness?
Participant 5 indicated that the amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process is extremely important. Institution 5 dedicated two years to the reaffirmation process, which, according to P-5, was a sufficient amount of time. While two to three years is a commonly allotted time for the reaffirmation, it should never be the actual starting point when it comes to document effectiveness. P-5 noted that Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 was one of the most challenging aspects of the review process, mainly because the data collection for this standard proved to be very difficult. According to P-5 the faculty did not fully understand what was needed, therefore, the data for this standard was not easily accessible. Participant 5 describes the process as “starting from ground zero.”

**Gaps and Obstacles**

Participant 5 identified two major gaps in the institution’s assessment process. The first was that the assessments of programs were often not completed. The second gap was that the assessment results were not appropriately used to bring about improvements in the academic programs.

One of the greatest obstacles the institution faced, according to P-5, was a “lack of leadership and support for assessment.” In addition, Participant 5 also added that many of the faculty members did not have a good understanding of what was required, and consequently found the assessment process intimidating.

**Summary of Findings/Conclusion**

This case study revealed the practices of an institution that initially failed to successfully document its levels of effectiveness linked to student learning and
achievement. Assessment of student learning at this institution was not systemic and not seen as a priority at this institution. The assessment processes were not supported by the institution’s senior leaders and were not ingrained in the institution’s culture according to Participant 5. Furthermore, the institution’s documentation of its assessment of the academic programs and student learning (Compliance Report) appeared incomplete and lacking in evidence.

As a result, Institution 5 was found noncompliant with Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1. More specifically, the institution failed to provide sufficient evidence to the Off-Site Committee to prove that they identified expected student learning outcomes, assessed the achievement of the SLOs, and used the results of the assessment to improve the academic programs and overall student learning. According to the report, the Off-Site Committee noted their difficulty in verifying the institution’s processes, even after an extensive review of the supporting documents provided. Institution 5 completed the required focus report in response to the off-site findings. Despite the additional evidence provided in the focus report, the On-Site Committee also found I-5 in noncompliance with CS 3.3.1.1 due to a lack of evidence documentation. Institution 5 completed a Response Report to the Visiting Committee to address CS 3.3.1.1, as well as other findings. The institution was required to address the concerns outlined by the On-Site Committee.

While noting that the reaffirmation process was very difficult, P-5 also felt that it was a rewarding experience for the institution because it “gave some credibility to the importance of assessing student learning outcomes.” After careful review of its program
and processes and taking into consideration the feedback from the review committees, Institution 5 submitted its final report and was reaffirmed in 2012.

**Case Study Six (I-6)**

**Brief Introduction**

This case study was conducted on a public degree granting institution, classified by SACSCOC as a Track B/Level III institution. This institution will henceforth be referred to as Institution 6 (I-6). I-6 is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a medium four-year, primarily residential institution, which means that based on the fall enrollment data, the full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment is between 3,000–9,999 degree-seeking students, and 25% - 49% of the undergraduates living on campus, with a minimum of 50% attending full time (Carnegie Foundation, 2013).

Institution 6 focuses on creating a student-centered environment with a mission of providing quality educational programs and research opportunities. This institution also places great emphasis on diversity and community. I-6 offers both undergraduate and graduate degrees, and its level III ranking from SACSCOC indicates that the graduate degrees offered are at the master’s level.

**Data Collection and Review**

To increase the validity of this study, the researcher employed data triangulation and utilized multiple sources of data (Yin, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Sapsford & Jupp, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Data were obtained through the analysis of (a) online public documents, (b) private institutional documents, (c) an on-line survey, and (d) a one-on-one semi-structured interview.
The SACSCOC Member/Candidate List for 2013 - used to identify the institutions reviewed for reaffirmation in 2011-2012, and the SACSCOC 2011-2012 Report Findings - used to identify institutions in noncompliance with Comprehensive Standard (CS) 3.3.1.1, were obtained via the SACSCOC website. The participant from I-6 completed the on-line survey and took part in a semi-structured interview conducted via telephone. Participant 6 did not provide a copy of the institution’s response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1. Institution 6 was found compliant with this standard and therefore did not have a disclosure statement. The mission statement and organizational chart for I-6 was obtained from the institution’s website. Table 25 provides an overview the data collection instruments used and analyzed for this institution.

Table 25

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Documents Reviewed for Institution 6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Data Collection Instrument</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Member/Candidate/ Applicant List 2013</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Report Findings</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Institution Disclosure Statement</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 25 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Report Response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution documents IE related to student learning</td>
<td>No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Monitoring Report</td>
<td>Examined how the institution responded to a review finding and further documented IE related to student learning in response to a non-compliant finding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution responds to a review finding and further documented IE related to student learning in response to a non-compliant finding</td>
<td>N/A</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Mission</td>
<td>Verified the purpose of the institution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Organizational Chart</td>
<td>Used to determine how the institution’s IE related departments are structure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Determine the participant’s views on, the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Interview</td>
<td>Gain an in-depth understanding of the participant’s views on the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The participating administrator from Institution 6 was also asked to rate the importance of the impact of seven specific factors on institutional effectiveness. These factors were rated on a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 meant *Not at all Important*; 2 meant *Slightly Important*; 3 meant *Moderately Important*; 4 meant *Very Important*; and 5 meant *Extremely Important*. Each of the factors coincides with the independent variables of this study. Table 26 provides an overview of the importance of these factors/variables from the perspective of Participant 6 (P-6). All responses from Participant 6 (P-6) were obtained from an interview conducted by the researcher on November 22, 2013.
Table 26

_Institution 6 - Rating of Variables_

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role that your institutional leaders play in supporting or facilitating</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>your IE effort</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure of your institution’s planning, assessment, and institutional</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>research departments</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to Key IE areas (e.g.</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Planning, Assessment, IE, IR)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culture of your institution in support of assessment, accountability and</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>shared responsibility for IE related to student learning and achievement</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The application of technology to support your assessment and IE processes</td>
<td>Moderately Important (3)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your institution’s planning and assessment processes (i.e. evidencing IE</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>through on-going assessment and continuous improvement)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Analysis and Results**

_Institutional Leadership and Administration_

RQ1: How is institutional effectiveness impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders?

At Institution 6, the role that leaders play in supporting or facilitating institutional effectiveness activities is seen as _extremely important_. Participant 6 describes the institution’s model for leader involvement in assessment as one that works well, noting
that campus leaders actively participate in the assessment process. Explicating that the president and provost encourage assessment on campus and frequently inquire about the departments’ progress and completion status, Participant 6 stated that the leaders value and support a culture of assessment. Participant 6 also affirmed that institutional leaders hold employees accountable for the execution of their assessment duties. According to P-6, “assessment completions are tied to annual performance reviews.”

P-6 added that there is a clear culture of collaboration and shared responsibility, explaining that the vice president for academic affairs and the assessment officer constantly interact with employees to encourage and assist department with their assessment. Participant 6 also stated that leaders in key roles, such as department chairs and deans, “play a major role in the institution’s successful assessment processes.”

**Institutional Structure for Planning, Assessment and Research**

RQ2: How do the institution’s planning, assessment, and research departments’ structures impact institutional effectiveness?

At Institution 6, planning, assessment, and institutional research is managed in a single office. The director reports directly to the university’s president and sits on the president’s cabinet. I-6 centralized structure includes the director, an administrative assistant, an assistant director dedicated to assessment and a data analyst. Participant 6 asserted that when it comes to the institution’s ability to evidence institutional effectiveness demarcated by student learning, having a centralized structure is a very important factor. P-6 explains that the department structure within the organization is vital to their ability to carry out their functions, and stated that,
The assessment office must be properly placed in the organization structure. Reporting to the president directly is important for the Office of Institutional Research, Planning, and Assessment – it helps maintain the level of objectivity and a neutral aspect of the office, which in turn allows for greater accessibility.

**Institutional Allocation of Human, Fiscal, and Physical Resources in Key IE Areas**

RQ3: How does the allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources impact the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness?

Participant 6 reported that having adequate resources has played a major role in the institution’s ability to evidence it levels of effectiveness. According to P-6, providing the administrative, technical, physical, and fiscal resources needed to support the department’s assessment and IE effort has always been a priority for the president, P-6 explains that having a department that is adequately funded in all these of areas improves the IE efforts and overall results for the institution.

**Institutional Culture**

RQ4: What role does the culture of the institution play in its ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness?

Culture is seen as a very important factor in the institution’s ability to successfully demonstrate institutional effectiveness. Participant 6 asserted that the institution has a culture of on-going assessment, but more importantly, assessment result are being used to inform and/or improve short- and long-range planning, decision making, and allocation of resources at the institution. Institution 6 is data driven and data informed according to P-6. Participant 6 stated that data is used to make decisions related to recruitment, and
application of assessment results allow faculty to “see the impact of changes on their programs.”

At I-6, constituents are encouraged to participate through “constant interaction and feedback.” Participant 6 reported that the institution’s systemic feedback process “heightens the importance of what’s being done.” Additionally, establishing relationship with constituents is an important part of the culture at Institution 6. P-6 explained that establishing a good rapport with the faculty and staff is an effective strategy that increases constituents’ overall understanding of the department’s functions, and compliance with the assessment requirements.

**Institutional Planning and Assessment Processes**

RQ5: How do the institution’s planning and assessment processes impact overall institutional effectiveness?

The institution’s planning and assessment process for evidencing IE through ongoing assessment and continuous improvement is a very important factor for Institution 6. At I-6, “assessment is systemic and ongoing,” outcomes are identified for each program, assessed, and the results are used to make programmatic changes. All assessment plans are tied to the mission and strategic plans. In addition, feedback on the plans and assessment results is an important part of the process for evidencing IE. According to P-6, the “feedback has to happen otherwise assessment is useless.”
Use of Technology in Key IE Areas

RQ6: What role does technology play in the institution’s ability to demonstrate that it engages in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process?

At Institution 6, an institution-wide assessment and reporting software is used for planning and assessment at all levels. This system however, has not been fully integrated throughout the institution. Participant 6 reported that the program utilization varied across campus, as some users did not completely understand how to use the system. According to P-6, getting faculty and staff to learn new software is difficult, and without pressure from the top, many users were less inclined to allot the time needed to learn the software. Participant 6 explained that “the software inhibited the process because people did not want to use it.” Consequently, the application of technology to support assessment and IE processes was rated moderately important by Participant 6.

Institutional Accreditation Preparation Period

RQ7: How does the institution's accreditation preparation period impact its overall effectiveness?

The amount of time needed to prepare for accreditation varies for the institution. Participant 6 indicated that this is a very important factor. According to P-6, the 3 years the institution allocated to the reaffirmation process was sufficient, but only because of the assessment processes were already in place at the institution. P-6 noted that without an established planning and assessment process, along with constituents who have a clear
understanding of what needs to be done and how to do it, an institution may need to allocate more time to the process to be successful.

Gaps and Obstacles

P-6 was asked to describe any gaps in the assessment process at I-6 along with any obstacles faced during the reaffirmation process. One significant gap identified by P-6 was the fact that “some of the programs had vague outcomes specified, and/or poor measurements in place.” Participant 6 noted that an obstacle the institution faced was the ability to provide feedback to all constituents on a consistent basis. Consequently, the institution created assessment committees to assist in providing timely feedback thus rectifying this shortcoming.

Summary of Findings/Conclusion

Assessment of student learning at Institution 6 is an on-going and systematic process. The assessment processes are adequately supported by the institution’s senior leaders who played a crucial role in ensuring that all responsible parties were held accountable. While this institution had a finding related to CS 3.3.1.1 by the Off-Site Committee, this case study revealed the practices of an institution that overall has successfully documented its levels of effectiveness linked to student learning and achievement. I-6 had no findings by SACSCOC related to CS 3.3.1.1 after the off-site review and was reaffirmed by SACSCOC in 2012.

In assessing what aided the institution in properly documenting its levels of effectiveness, P-6 advised others to take four important steps. First, establish relationship with the institution’s faculty and staff members, and develop alliances with supporters,
those individuals who will get the job done and encourage other to do the same.

Secondly, implement a systemic feedback system, where constituents are provided with timely feedback on their assessment efforts so that they understand the process, and can apply the results to bring about improvements. Participant 6 also added that leaders and those in key hiring positions should make every effort to hire the right people in all positions at the institution-individuals that know and value assessment. Finally, Participant 6 explicated that having a centralized structure for IE and ensuring that the IE department head reports directly to the president is an essential component. This structure, according to P-6, places the department in a more authoritative position and allows for the proper execution of the department’s functions.

Case Study Seven (I-7)

Brief Introduction

This case study was conducted on a public degree granting institution, classified by SACSCOC as a Track A/Level II institution. This institution will henceforth be referred to as Institution 7 (I-7). I-7 is classified by the Carnegie Foundation as a small four-year, primarily non-residential institution, which means that based on the fall enrollment data, the full-time equivalent (FTE) enrollment is between 1,000 –2,999 degree-seeking students, and fewer than 25% of undergraduates living on campus, with fewer than 50% of the students attending full time (Carnegie Foundation, 2013).

Institution 7 is accredited by the Commission on Colleges of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools to award certificates and associate and baccalaureate
degrees. The institution’s mission is centered on students learning and empowerment, and places great emphasis on diversity and community enhancement.

**Data Collection and Review**

Using data triangulation, the researcher collected data through multiple mediums. This approach was selected to enhance the validity and reliability of the study (Yin, 1989; Creswell, 1994; Sapsford & Jupp, 1996; Merriam, 1998; Gay, Mills, & Airasian, 2009). Data collected for the study were obtained through the analysis of online public documents, the analysis of private institutional documents, an online survey, and a semi-structured interview.

The SACSCOC Member/Candidate List for 2013, which was used to identify the institutions reviewed for reaffirmation in 2011-2012, and the SACSCOC 2011-2012 Report Findings, which was used to identify institutions in noncompliance with Comprehensive Standard (CS) 3.3.1.1, were both obtained via the SACSCOC website. The participant from I-7 completed the on-line survey and took part in a semi-structured interview conducted via telephone. In addition, I-7 mission and organizational charts were obtained from the institution’s website. SACSCOC found Institution 7 noncompliant with Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1; therefore, a copy of the disclosure statement regarding the institution’s status was obtained from the SACSCOC website.

Participant 7 provided a copy of the institution’s initial response to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 submitted to SACSCOC via the compliance certification report. Also provided was a copy of the On-site Committee Report in reference to CS 3.3.1.1, along with the institution’s first and second monitoring reports submitted for
Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1. Table 27 provides an overview of the data collection instruments used and analyzed for this institution.

Table 27

*Documents Reviewed for Institution 7*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Data Collection Instrument</th>
<th>Purpose/Use</th>
<th>Reviewed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Member/Candidate/Applicant List 2013</td>
<td>Identified the institution as a member of the 2011-2012 reaffirmation class</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SACSCOC Report Findings</td>
<td>Identified institutions with a non-compliant status for CS 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Online Institution Disclosure</td>
<td>Identified the extent of the Institution’s noncompliance, and identified the sanction conditions set by SACSCOC for the institution to meet to return to full-accreditation status</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Report Response to Comprehensive</td>
<td>Examined how the institution documents IE related to student learning</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Standard 3.3.1.1</td>
<td>Examined how the institution responded to a review finding and further documented IE related to student learning in response to a non-compliant finding</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Mission</td>
<td>Verified the purpose of the institution</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Institution’s Organizational Chart</td>
<td>Used to determine how the institution’s IE related departments are structure</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Survey</td>
<td>Determine the participant’s views on, the perceived impact of each variable on IE</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The participating administrator from Institution 7 was asked to rate the importance of seven specific factors that impact the institution’s ability to evidence effectiveness demarcated by student learning and achievement. Each factor was aligned with the independent variables of this study. The factors were rated on a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 meant *Not at all Important*; 2 meant *Slightly Important*; 3 meant *Moderately Important*; 4 meant *Very Important*; and 5 meant *Extremely Important*. An overview of Participant 7 (P-7) opinions on the importance of these factors/variables are provided in Table 28. All responses from Participant 7 (P-7) were obtained from an interview conducted by the researcher on November 27, 2013.

**Table 28**

*Institution 7 - Rating of Variables*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role that your institutional leaders play in supporting or facilitating your IE effort</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure of your institution’s planning, assessment, and institutional research departments</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 28 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor/Variable</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to Key IE areas (e.g. Planning, Assessment, IE, IR)</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The culture of your institution in support of assessment, accountability and shared responsibility for IE related to student learning and achievement</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The application of technology to support your assessment and IE processes</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your institution’s planning and assessment processes (i.e. evidencing IE through on-going assessment and continuous improvement)</td>
<td>Extremely Important (5)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process</td>
<td>Very Important (4)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Analysis and Results

Institutional Leadership and Administration

RQ1: How is institutional effectiveness impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders?

Participant 7 asserts that the role that leaders play in supporting or facilitating institutional effectiveness activities is an extremely important factor for evidencing IE. Reporting that the lack of support from the institution’s president and senior administration was a major obstacle in the institution’s reaffirmation process, Participant 7 notes that some of the administrators need to be “more proactive in their roles.” Since the reaffirmation, however, campus leaders are said to have placed more value on
assessment efforts resulting in greater compliance with assessment requirement from the institution’s constituents according to Participant 7.

**Institutional Structure for Planning, Assessment and Research**

RQ2: How do the institution’s planning, assessment, and research departments’ structures impact institutional effectiveness?

The structure of the institution’s planning, assessment and research functions plays a major role in how well the institution is able to document IE and student learning according to P-7. Participant 7 reported that the centralized structure of the department works well. Planning assessment and institutional research are all integrated in a single office. Centralizing the functions alone is not enough, to be effective there needs to adequate allocation of resources as well. Prior to the reaffirmation process, the office consisted of two persons, one dedicated to IE and a data specialist. Currently, there is a staff person dedicated to IE and planning, one to academic assessment, an institutional research person and a data specialist in addition to the administrative assistant. According to P-7, the new structure, with addition staff, has improved the department productivity and levels of support for data and assessment assistance needed throughout the campus.

**Institutional Allocation of Human, Fiscal, and Physical Resources in Key IE Areas**

RQ3: How does the allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources impact the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness?

As with any functional area, resources allocation is critical to the IE related areas. This not only includes financial support but also the proper allocation of human resources
as well. During the reaffirmation, I-7 was undoubtedly understaffed in the IE department. However, as indicate above, the institution has since rectified the situation through an increase in personnel. As reported by P-7, this change has allowed the staff to effectively direct their efforts to and provide greater support to the institution’s faculty and staff.

Institutional Culture

RQ4: What role does the culture of the institution play in its ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness?

Culture plays a major role in the institution’s ability to demonstrate its levels of effectiveness. The gradual shift in culture experienced at Institution 7 since the reaffirmation supports this claim. According to the SACSCOC Disclosure Statement, Institution 7 failed to demonstrate IE through an ongoing, systemic process of identifying expected outcomes, assessing achievement, and providing evidence of improvement in the educational programs. According to P-7, the culture at Institution 7 was not one of collaboration and shared responsibility. Participant 7 reported that “in the past everyone did their own assessment and there were no real collaborations.” It was reported that many of the constituents did not understand the assessment processes. Additionally, the assessment results attained were not regularly shared in useful forms nor discussed on a regular basis.

The On-Site Committee found that the institution lacked a culture of evidence. P-7 concurred with the findings of the review, and felt that the review process allowed the institution to make the necessary changes to foster a culture that is more conducive to
evidencing IE. P-7 indicated that while “there is still needs to be some nudging to get everyone onboard with working collaboratively,” administrators are working together more and are mutually supportive of each other.

Institutional Planning and Assessment Processes

RQ5: How do the institution’s planning and assessment processes impact overall institutional effectiveness?

Institution 7 has a number of planning and assessment processes that are considered best practices, such as annual assessment of academic programs, the use of curriculum mapping in program assessment, and periodic academic program reviews. Participant 7 describes the institution’s planning and assessment processes for evidencing IE and extremely important. However, the implementation of these processes is where the institution fell short. The planning and assessment activities at Institution 7 seemed to be carried out in silos, all of the data needed for assessment were not collected on an on-going bases, and not all constituents had a clear understanding of what the assessment process required or how the results should be used. This resulted in a lack of buy-in in the process and inconsistent documentation of assessment results among other things.

Use of Technology in Key IE Areas

RQ6: What role does technology play in the institution’s ability to demonstrate that it engages in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process?

The use of technology to support the institution’s assessment and IE efforts is viewed as very important by P-7. At I-7, specific forms and template are used to
document assessment activities. Participant 7 explained that the institution does not employ any of the commercial assessment and planning software. The forms used to collect assessment plans and results are created in-house and are tailored to meet the needs of each program. The documents are shared via a Windows-based program and the overall process is described as user-friendly. P-7 also noted that the system streamlines the planning and assessment processes, and adequately meets the institution’s needs.

Institutional Accreditation Preparation Period

RQ7: How does the institution’s accreditation preparation period impact its overall effectiveness?

Institution 7 allocated 1 year and 2 months to complete the certification of compliance report as part of the reaffirmation process. Participant 7 stated that the amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process is a very important factor but, establishing an on-going data collection process is essential. Like most institutions, P-7 agreed that having an established data collection and assessment practices is a critical component in successfully completing the reaffirmation process in the time allotted.

Gaps and Obstacles

One gap in the assessment process identified by I-7 was the ability of the institution to adequately assess student performances through periodic or 5-year reviews of the programs. P-7 stated that “there needs to be more incorporation of real data analysis to aid in decision making for program improvements.” The greatest obstacle described by Participant 7 was a lack of leadership support from senior administrators. P-
7 felt that leaders needed to place greater emphasis on the importance of assessment outside of accreditation.

**Summary of Findings/Conclusion**

At Institution 7, assessment of student learning was not an on-going and systematic process. Many of the senior leaders did not adequately support the institution’s assessment processes, and the staff did not fully grasped the assessment requirements. Furthermore, the institution’s culture was not one of collaboration and shared responsibility. Consequently, I-7 failed to prove that they systematically engaged in an ongoing process of measuring and documenting student learning and performance within the institution’s educational program and was found non-compliant with CS 3.3.1.1. The institution was sanctioned by SACSCOC, and placed on warning for a period of one year. During this time, I-7 was required to provide monitoring reports to address this standard, as well as others.

At the time of this study, Institution 7 had made a number of changes to improve its ability to evidence assessment of student learning and overall levels of effectiveness. This included increased support from senior administrators for the institution’s IE processes, a new structure for the IE office- with the addition of needed staff members, and the implementation of a feedback system to promote continuous communication with the institution’s constituents. Another major change Institution 7 made, and noted in its response report to the Commission, was the development of new reporting format for evidencing the assessment of learning outcomes for each academic program and
subsequent use of results for improvements based on the findings. Accordingly, Institution 7 was reaffirmed in 2013.
CHAPTER VI
FINDINGS, CONCLUSIONS, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

This study was designed to explore the phenomenon of institutional effectiveness (IE) in higher education institutions related to student learning. The researcher identified seven variables within the institution’s internal environment, and examined how IE, as demarcated by SACSCOC Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 (Institutional Effectiveness – Educational Programs), was impacted by these variables. The seven variables examined in the study were (a) institutional leadership and administration; (b) institutional structure of planning assessment and research; (c) institutional allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources in key IE areas; (d) institutional culture; (e) institutional planning and assessment processes; (f) use of technology in key IE areas; and (g) the institution’s accreditation preparation period.

This qualitative research inquiry employed a multi-site case study approach. With the selection of seven institutions, the phenomenon was studied at each site and presented as a single case study. Using Yin’s (2009) replication logic, a cross-case analysis was conducted after the seven case studies were reviewed. Chapter VI presents the findings of this comparative analysis.
Findings

The institutions examined were divided into three categories based on the outcome of the reaffirmation process as it relates to Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 (see Figure 15). Category A includes institutions that were also cited for Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 during the reaffirmation process. These institutions were cited for significant noncompliance and were denied reaffirmation of accreditation by SACSCOC. Institutions in this category were sanctioned and placed on warning for a period of one year.

![Institution Grouping Diagram](image)

*Figure 6. Institution Grouping*
Category B includes institutions that were also reaffirmed, but these institutions were cited as non-compliant with Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 during the off-site review and/or the on-site review of the reaffirmation of accreditation process. The final category, Category C, includes institutions that were reaffirmed, and were not cited for Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 during any of the phases of the reaffirmation of accreditation process.

RQ1: How is institutional effectiveness impacted by the roles undertaken by the institution’s leaders?

The cross case analysis revealed that, depending on the role that the institutional leaders take on, institutional effectiveness can be positively or adversely impacted. In institutions where leaders were said to value and support a culture of assessment, whether it was a senior administrator such as the president or provost, or the academic school deans or department chairs, the process of documenting institutional effectiveness related to student learning was positively impacted. Participants of these institutions noted that the leaders actively participated in the assessment processes and/or provided guidance for the assessment of IE. In addition, it was also reported that these leaders held employees accountable for the execution of assessment duties for their respective programs. Consequently, the leaders aided in the facilitation of constituent buy-in and a culture of assessment at the institution, and ultimately supported the institution’s ability to demonstrate its effectiveness in the areas of academic programs and student learning.

On the other hand, both institutions in Category A reported that the senior administrators (President and Provost) at their institutions did not actively participate in
the assessment processes. While both of the institutions indicated that the vice presidents of the institution were involved in the assessment of institutional effectiveness, the role taken on by the vice president was described as one of oversight and monitoring, by one of the institutions. The participant at the other institution noted that leaders, and consequently others, placed very little value on assessment, and this behavior was accompanied by a lack of support for a culture of assessment and very little resources to support assessment activities.

RQ2: How do the institution’s planning, assessment, and research departments’ structures impact institutional effectiveness?

All of the participants agreed that having a centralized structure—one in which the institution’s planning, assessment, and institutional research functions are managed under a single department—is the best arrangement to support institutional effectiveness. Some participants reported that it promoted synergy between the functional areas. Others noted that the centralized structure encouraged a system of checks and balances where the institution could properly align its planning and assessment process to inform decision making, and improve programs and services through the enactment of needed changes and the proper allocation of institutional resources.

While all of the institutions that participated in the study indicated that they had a centralized structure, which worked well, the position of the department in the organization, and levels of perceived authority were two areas of concern. Strategic planning is the president’s function, and the oversight of the academic programs falls under the duties of the provost/vice president for academic affairs. The question then
becomes, is the Institutional Effectiveness office better positioned under the president’s office or under the provost/vice president for academic affairs office? Some of the participants believed that the best structure to get the job done is to report directly to the president. For these individuals, having the office/department under the president’s office fosters a sense of objectivity and assumed authority. Others believe that reporting to the provost will allow for greater access to and compliance from the academic programs/departments. A third option is to have a dual reporting system with a straight report to one leader and an indirect report to the other. The simple answer is it depends. It depends on a number of factors that are often unique to the institution such as the culture of the institution, the constituents’ perception of authority, and the established rapport between the department and the constituents, among other things.

RQ3: How does the allocation of human and financial resources impact the institution’s ability to demonstrate effectiveness?

There are many advantages to having a centralized planning, assessment and institutional research structure. The integration of these functional areas can facilitate continuity, and enable informed decision-making. However, despite the fact the all seven participating institutions indicated that they had a centralized structure; the strength of the structure in some of the institutions was compromised because of deficiencies in the allocation of human and financial resources in the department responsible for IE. The centralized structure of Institution 7 was compromised, or was less than effective due to a lack of personnel. At institution 1, the IE department was adequately staffed with 5 individuals, due to a lack funding to support professional development, the staff and
faculty training needs were not met. Executing even the most mundane job functions becomes a difficult undertaking without proper training.

On the other hand, institutions 2, 4, and 6 all confirmed that their resources were sufficient to carry out the functions of the department, and that it played significant role in the institutions successful documentation of its IE practices tied to academic programs and student learning outcomes. In fact, while none of the institution claimed that resource allocation alone, or lack thereof, was the only determining factor in their ability to demonstrate or evidence levels of effectiveness, all seven of the institutions identified this variable as a very or extremely important to the institution.

RQ4: What role does the culture of the institution play in its ability to demonstrate institutional effectiveness?

The institution’s culture reflects its accepted practices and exposes what the constituents valued, and therefore support. These are considered the institution’s norms, and cultural norms influence every aspect of the institution.

To demonstrate institutional effectiveness the institution must have a “systematic, explicit, and documented process of measuring institutional performance against mission in all aspects of an institution” (SACSCOC, 2012a, p. 16). In addition, the institution has to use the results obtained from its assessment efforts to inform changes. This makes culture one of the biggest determining factors of IE. First, the organization must establish a culture of assessment and documentation where all employees view assessment as part of their job, and not something done for accreditation. Secondly, the institution must create a culture that embraces change. Without this type of culture the process of using
assessment results to facilitate improvements, or “closing-the-loop,” is lost, and the entire
IE process is of little or no value and therefore a moot point.

The institution identified a number of variables that promote a culture conducive
to IE. The first was leadership involvement and support. While the leader alone cannot
define the culture of an institution, they influence the behavior of other within the
institution and therefore influence the culture.

A second factor was establishing relationships. In a complex organization such as
an institution of higher education the layers of hierarchy can sometime hinder progress.
Often time the IE office is given a great deal of responsibility without any real power or
authority regardless of where they are positioned in the organization’s structure. This is
why establishing a rapport of good working relationships between the IE office and the
faculty and staff is imperative.

Another factor was establishing a feedback system that promotes two-way
communication between the IE department and the faculty and staff. This not only
helped to improve constituents understanding of what is required, it also encouraged buy-
in into the assessment process. Additionally, on the other end, it helped the IE
departments gain insight into the academic department needs and allowed them to tailor
training efforts to address any shortcomings the institution may have had.

RQ5: How do the institution’s planning and assessment processes impact overall
institutional effectiveness?

Effective planning and assessment processes are essential components for proving
whether an institution is achieving its mission or not. Without which the institution has
no real sense of direction. Simply put, the plan describes how the institution intends to accomplish its stated mission, and the assessment process provides evidence of the institution’s success, or lack thereof. This process should be accompanied with an application of the results and/or plan of action for improvement when and wherever necessary.

A best practice is for these processes to be clearly identified, understood, accepted, executed, and continuously repeated. In other words, having an effective planning and assessment process is merely the first step in establishing institutional effectiveness. While the planning and assessment process lays the groundwork for what is to be done, how it is to be done, and what constitutes success at the end of the process, proper implementation is indispensable to the institution’s success. The planning and assessment processes at most of the institutions participating in this study were very similar, but when and how they are implemented at each institution is what made the difference. A major determining factor for many of the institutions was the actual implementation and follow-through. The institutions that were successful were the ones that ensured that the execution of their processes were not arbitrary or haphazard, but rather on-going and continuously monitored and improved. These institutions established a culture of assessment that strategically involved the constituents in all aspects of the process.

RQ6: What role does technology play in the institution’s ability to demonstrate that it engages in an on-going, integrated, research-based planning and evaluation process?
Technology has become a huge part of all aspects of our lives, and higher education is no exception. While the ratings by the institution on the importance of applying technology to support assessment and IE processes were across the scale, ranging from 1 to 5, all of the institutions indicated that they used some form of technology to streamline the assessment and documentation of IE in their academic programs. The institutions used various software programs to document their assessment process and generated reports that were provided to the reviewers as evidence of their effectiveness. Analysis of the case studies showed that institutions with adequate technological support in terms of software, people and training were more likely to see the technology as less important to the process. However, those institutions that experienced challenges with either the attainment of needed technology, technical training, or IT support, rated this variable higher on the importance scale as an influential factor. This element may account for the varying differences in opinion across institution.

RQ7: How does the institution accreditation preparation period impact it overall effectiveness?

Similar to the ratings for technology application, the impact of the institution accreditation preparation period on overall effectiveness was rated across the board. Participants’ rating fell between 2 and 5 on the levels of importance. The institutions reported that they spent anywhere from 14 months to 3 years preparing for the reaffirmation. One important finding uncovered in the cross case analysis was the fact that the reaffirmation preparation occurred in two parts.
The first part of the preparation is the actually on-going assessment of academic programs, and the documentation of assessment results and improvement efforts on an annual basis. This is something that is only fully recognized in institutions that develop a culture of assessment. The second part of the reaffirmation process is what occurs during the 14 months to 3 years allocated to responding the SACSCOC Compliance Certification Report.

Institution’s that assessed annually and documented the processes and changes made as a result, reported that preparation period was less difficult. Essentially, these institutions realized that the actual preparation for reaffirmation is on-going, and the year or two that’s dedicated to preparing the responses and facilitating the reviews is not a starting point but rather a summation period. Consequently, a rating of less importance was placed on this variable.

On the other hand, institutions that may have initiated their assessment processes in preparation for reaffirmation, or had to reestablish or reinforce their processes during the 1 to 3 year period leading up to the review, found the process to be more burdensome, time consuming, and difficult. While some institutions in this scenario were able to successfully complete the process and were reaffirmed, others were unable to.

The take away is that preparing for accreditation can be a time consuming endeavor, and depending on the state of the institution and its assessment processes and application, the amount of time needed, and perceived difficulty varies from institution to institution.
Variable Rating

The participating administrators from each of the seven institutions were asked to rate the importance of seven variables. The variables were to be rated based on their significance to the institution’s ability to evidence institutional effectiveness demarcated by student learning. Each variable rated was aligned with the independent variables identified for this study. The importance of the variable were rated using a scale of 1 - 5 where 1 meant Not at all Important; 2 meant Slightly Important; 3 meant Moderately Important; 4 meant Very Important; and 5 meant Extremely Important. Table 29 provides the average rating for each variable based on the participants’ responses.

Table 29

Institution Rating of the Variables Identified

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The role that your institutional leaders play in supporting or facilitating your IE effort</td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4.43</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The structure of your institution’s planning, assessment and institutional research departments</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>3.86</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### Table 29 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCALE</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>Average</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Not At All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Slightly</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Moderately</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Very</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Extremely</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Average Score</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to Key IE areas (e.g. Planning, Assessment, IE, IR)  
4 3 4.43

The culture of your institution in support of assessment, accountability and shared responsibility for IE and student learning and achievement  
3 4 4.57

The application of technology to support your assessment and IE processes  
1 3 2 1 3.29

Your institution’s planning and assessment processes (i.e. evidencing IE through on-going assessment and continuous improvement)  
2 5 4.71

The amount of time allocated to the reaffirmation process  
1 1 3 2 3.86

The numbers under each column indicates the total number of participants that viewed the variable at the labeled level of importance. The average rating for each variable is also provided. As indicated above, five out of the seven participants viewed
their institution’s planning and assessment processes as extremely important. The remaining two institutions rated this variable as very important. Four out of the seven participants viewed the culture of their institution in support of assessment, accountability and shared responsibility for IE and student learning and achievement as extremely important. The remaining three institutions also rated this variable as very important.

The role that your institutional leaders play in supporting or facilitating the institution’s IE effort was rated as extremely important by three of the seven participants and the remaining four participants rated this variable as very important. Similarly, the allocation of human, fiscal and physical resources to Key IE areas was also rated as extremely important by three participants and very important by the remaining four. The other three variables were rated across the board by the seven institutions.

**Conclusion**

Measuring and documenting institutional effectiveness is not a one-size-fit-all process; it can be effectively accomplished in a variety of ways. The best approach for an institution is one that is tailored to the institution’s unique environment and directly supports the institution’s mission. Nevertheless, there are common factors that can greatly influence any institution’s ability to demonstrate levels of effectiveness linked to student learning and achievement.

**Emerging Themes**

The review of each case study revealed that there were a number of themes echoed at each institution as determining factors in their ability to evidence effectiveness specifically associated with student learning. During the initial phase reoccurring themes
between the cases were identified using an open code approach. In Phase 2 of the analysis, the researcher reviewed and recoded/grouped the themes to reduce the volume of information; this resulted in the 14 themes reoccurring themes. The emergent themes after Phase II of the analysis and examples of participants’ responses are outlined in Table 30.

Table 30

*Emerging Theme During Phase II of the Analysis*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reoccurring/Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Example of Constituents Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Leadership Support and Involvement</strong></td>
<td>I would like the leaders to participate in our assessment meetings, be more vocal about the importance of assessment, and support the IE staff in their efforts. Leaders should be as involved in the assessment process as they expect faculty to be. Leaders support assessment efforts and have made it mandatory for all departments. You have to have an administrator that cares enough to support the assessment process. Without the support of the president and provost we cannot successfully gather information.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Accountability</strong></td>
<td>Assessment completions are tied to annual performance reviews. There are no consequences for department who do not complete their assessment requirements. Responsibilities for the execution of assessment duties are contractual obligations for the Chairs and Deans. The extent to</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reoccurring/Emerging Themes</td>
<td>Example of Constituents Comments</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>----------------------------</td>
<td>----------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Adequate Resources</td>
<td>More staff is needed to address our IE concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Financial resources are needed to hire additional staff</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>We have adequate financial, personnel, physical and technology resources. This is a priority for our leaders.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment Processes and Practices</td>
<td>Assessment is systematic and on-going but views of assessment vary</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>IE is documented by a long paper trail for every degree program and each administrative unit. We have 99% participation, and a yearly report of what was learned and how we are closing the loop.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of Assessment</td>
<td>Constituents do not understand the importance of assessment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Faculty and staff are intimidated by the process and do not have a good understanding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Academic Affairs administrators lack expertise in assessment</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 30 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reoccurring/Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Example of Constituents Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Assessment is not fully understood or embraced</td>
<td>Levels of understanding varies – those who have been around a while understand the requirements and importance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There is a lack of participation by leaders, faculty and staff</td>
<td>Assessment is ingrained in the culture on the academic side</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At times faculty may perceive documenting student learning as a burden</td>
<td>I am in constant communication with the provost</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sit at the Presidents table with other VPs and I am able to share information about the assessment efforts being made</td>
<td>Communication with Leaders</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I server on the Executive Cabinet and has direct contact with institutional leaders</td>
<td>Assessment is forced upon constituents</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>User buy-in is established less through punitive actions and more through helping departments understand the importance and benefits of engaging in assessment</td>
<td>Buy-in/ Faculty Support</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Administrator support helps to gain faculty buy-in</td>
<td>Feedback has to happen otherwise assessment is useless</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Feedback is provided with each assessment plan</td>
<td>Feedback</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I would advise all institutions to develop a good feedback loop to improve assessment efforts</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You have to establish relationships between constituents and the IE Department</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 30 (continued)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reoccurring/Emerging Themes</th>
<th>Example of Constituents Comments</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Constituents are more responsive due to long standing relationship</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Establishing a rapport and identifying your champions are important aspects</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Annual assessment reports are sent to all campus leaders</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We establish an assessment day to share data and establish common goals and outcomes for students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Information is shared with the Deans regularly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment plans are used in our budget hearings for resource allocation</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment data is not used for decision making or improvements</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment data is shared and used to establish common goals and outcomes for students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We provide on-going training and one-on-one training as needed</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>We offer training on a regular basis. Those that are trained do perform better</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Training is needed but the staff does not have the time due to its size</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>A centralized structure is important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The placement of the IE department in the organization is extremely important</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The IE department place in the institution’s structure influences its authority and credibility</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
These themes were reviewed again in the third phase of the analysis. In this phase, the researcher grouped the related 14 themes into the following four major categories: Leadership, Institutional Culture; Resource Allocation; and Planning and Assessment Processes based on the nature of each factor or the related participants’ responses to them. This grouping is illustrated in Table 31.

Table 31

*Grouping of Emerging Themes During Phase III*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Leadership</th>
<th>Culture</th>
<th>Planning and Assessment Processes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leadership Support and Involvement</td>
<td>Shared Responsibility</td>
<td>Adequate Resources</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Accountability</td>
<td>Buy-in / Faculty Support</td>
<td>Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Communication with Leaders</td>
<td>Relationship</td>
<td>Structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Understanding of Assessment</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The four categories were identified as the core variables or factors presented across sites that essentially impacted the institution’s overall effectiveness. The Minnis model (Figure 16) was created to provide a visual illustration of the four influential variables on IE and student learning outcomes assessment, and the relationship among them.
Figure 16. Minnis Institutional Effectiveness Model: Factors that Impact IE

At each of the seven institutions the importance, and impact, of the institution’s leader’s or senior administrator’s involvement was conveyed. Participants noted that the leader’s understanding of the impact of documenting IE, support of IE related activities including planning, assessment and institutional research, and participation in assessment related activities made a difference in the institution’s performance.

The Culture of the institution was overwhelmingly considered an important variable. Without an established culture of assessment, shared responsibility, and accountability, the IE departments found it difficult to adequately document the institutions effectiveness related to student learning during the reaffirmation of accreditation review process. Institutions that reported that they valued and supported assessment and institutional effectiveness were able to create a culture that was more conducive to the processes managed in the IE office.
The allocation of resource, which was influenced by the leaders and the institution’s culture, was also an important variable. A lack of adequate resources, whether financial, human, time, or technology, can hinder the department’s performance and overall IE. In some institutions a lack of personnel and time to provide the assistance needed was the issue, in others a lack of training was also an issue, and most resource issues were tied to a lack of funds.

The planning and assessment process was overall the most influential or important variable in adequately documenting IE related to student learning. This variable however, is greatly impacted by the aforementioned variables (leadership, culture, and resources). The institutions not only have to develop the process, they also have to properly implement the planning and assessment activities to be effective. This requires establishing a system or process that is on-going, systemic, integrated, and data-informed, resulting in improvement and attainment of the institution’s goal, objectives and overall mission. This was the area where most of the institutions fell short to different extents. On the extreme end, two of the institutions were either cited and received a sanctioned, being placed on warning for a period of one year. On the other end three of the institutions were cited but, after providing additional documentation in a follow-up response, these institutions were reaffirmed.

**Implications**

**Leader’s Roles**

As the Minnis model of IE indicates (Figure 16), leadership matters, and to be effective, this is where the institution should start. The institutions’ leaders influence the
culture of the organization and ultimately determine how the institutional resources are allocated. There are however, several factors that determine what influence leaders will have on the institution’s culture and their decision on how resources are allocated. One such factor is the leader’s knowledge of assessment of student learning and institutional effectiveness. The leader or senior administrator must have a clear understanding of institutional effectiveness processes and the requirements, both internal and external. Leaders must also apprehend that assessment of IE and student learning is an informative and transformative process that evidences the accomplishment of the institution’s mission, and not “something that is done solely for accreditation.”

In addition to understanding the processes and requirements, the institutions’ leader must also value a culture of assessment, and lead by example. In most of the institutions, the leaders that were described as someone who values a culture of assessment were the ones who demonstrated this through their support of, and participate in the institution’s IE related activities.

**Institutional Culture**

Culture is established based on what constituents value and considers important, and therefore support. Consequently, the institution’s culture also influences what resources are made available to the departments. In other words, the activities or projects that are valued are the ones given priority when funding decisions are made. Some of the study participants described this as the “institution’s politics.” The institution’s leaders must establish a culture of assessment, where all constituents participate and take ownership for the assessment requirements for their respective areas. In addition to this
shared-responsibility, there must also be a system of accountability and this is the leader’s responsibility. When the constituents of the institution are not held accountable for assessment in their respective areas, assessment is not viewed as a priority for the institution; therefore, the employees are not motivated or incentivized to act on these requirements.

**Resource Allocation**

While some institutions may be more endowed than others, when it comes down to resources one fact remains true, resources in every institution is limited. As indicated above, resource allocation is impacted by both the leader and what he/she values, and the culture of the organization. Accomplishing any task without adequate resources is difficult, and in some instances impossible, therefore resource allocation is an essential variable that leaders must careful consider. Leaders must ensure that the IE related departments are adequately staffed and supported with the financial resources needed to sustain the department functions. This can include general operating expenses and/or funding for professional development and training needs. Furthermore, the allocation of resources needed to engage in assessment related activities in all areas of the institution must be prudently considered as well. This can include financial resources, human resources, and in many instances, consideration of the amount of time allotted for the institution’s constituents to engage in planning and assessment (IE) activities in addition to their other job-related responsibilities.
Planning and Assessment (Institutional Effectiveness) Processes

The planning and assessment (IE) process goes far beyond documenting what should be done and how. A key component is ensuring the full implementation of the institution’s IE processes. The ability to transition from theory to application makes a difference in the success of the institution in documenting its levels of effectiveness.

Again, the established planning and assessment (IE) process must be on-going, integrated, systemic, and data-informed resulting in improvements in the academic programs. First, institutional leaders must make certain that the planning and assessment is on-going, which means that these processes repeatedly occur on a regular cycle. This cannot continue to be something done for the three years prior to the reaffirmation review and then set aside. Leaders must value the transformative nature of these processes and ensure it is recursive and not episodic. In addition, the planning and assessment processes must be integrated; connected to each other and overall decision making. In other words, the results of these processes should drive the decisions made at the institution and the processes must be systemic. The planning and assessment efforts should be large in scope and implemented throughout the entire institution. In addition, planning and assessment have to be data-informed processes. Leaders have to deconstruct the artificial sources of unsubstantiated information at their institutions and use these processes to gain insight in how they can improve their academic programs. Institutional leaders have to move from a mindset of compliance to a focus on improvement and mission accomplishment. In other words, these activities have to be
seen as something done for the betterment of the institution and its students, rather than something done in response to the requirements or criteria for an accreditation standard.

**Summary**

This study examined how specific internal variables impact institutions’ ability to evidence levels of effectiveness related to student learning. Seven variables were selected and seven higher education institutions in the southern accreditation region participated in the study. The Study participants provided great insight into the phenomenon by sharing an extensive amount of information about their institutions practices and experiences during the SACS Commission on Colleges 2011-2012 reaffirmation of accreditation review. Through a multi-site case study inquiry and a cross-case analysis, four dominant themes emerged; leadership, institutional culture, allocation of resource, and planning and assessment processes.

**Recommendations**

**Institutional Leadership**

- Gain a holistic view of the regional accreditation and assessment processes, and how they impact the institution, to serve as subject matter experts at the institutional level for all stakeholders.
- Take advantage of the professional development and training opportunities provided by the regional accrediting agency, as well as other related organizations on an on-going basis.
- Serve as an authoritative figure, but also motivate and influence institutional constituents to comply with the requirements of their assessment duties.
• Actively engage in and participate in all institutional assessment processes to support and validate the IE efforts.

**Institutional Effectiveness Structure**

• Organize a centralized IE department to incorporate the Planning, Assessment and Institutional Research units under a single department

• Staff the IE department with a sufficient number of permanent employees and ensure that at least one professional person oversees each of the three core areas of effectiveness.

• Ensure that hiring managers are knowledge of IE department functions in order to recruit, hire and retain competent skilled personnel for this area.

• Appoint IE Officer to serve as the institution’s SACSCOC liaison, reporting directly to the President of the institution.

• Establish a direct line of communication between IE Officer and Academic Affairs Office, and make certain that the IE Officer participate in all academic regulatory committees and decision-making bodies.

**Institutional Policies and Procedures**

• Make provision to educate all constituents on a regular basis to enhance their understanding of the institutional assessment requirements, processes and its importance in achieving the stated mission of the institution.

• Require campus-wide broad-based participation and continuous communications about the institution’s processes related to assessment and accreditation.
• Incorporate the requirements of the SACSCOC accreditation standards into the institution’s strategic initiatives, policies and subsequent practices to be continually enforced throughout the institution.

• Develop a comprehensive strategic plan with complementary assessment plans that involve and connects all constituents at all levels of the institution.

• Ensure that appropriate accountability measures and controls at each department level are developed and upheld as part of the institution’s policy.

• Include the assessment requirements of the institution to employee job functions, and evaluate employee performance accordingly.

Institutional Planning and Assessment Process

• Ensure the institution’s planning and assessment processes are on-going, systemically integrated throughout the institution, systematic and well documented.

• Appoint IE standing committees made-up of faculty and staff members who are trained to review the academic program outcomes assessment plans, and provide meaningful feedback to the academic departments.

• Assign specific days at the beginning and end of each year for constituent engagement in assessment related activities.

• Establish annual assessment timelines and achievement milestones for all areas of the institution; and make certain that the assessment timetable is adhered to.
• Establish a timely feedback system between the constituents responsible for assessing the academic programs (e.g. Department Chairs) and the IE department.

• Share assessment results and subsequent changes with all constituents in a number of written and oral formats on an on-going and timely basis.

**Institutional Resources**

• Consider all resources for institutional effectiveness as a whole; not only for the IE department, but also all areas of the institution that contribute to IE.

• Make the allocation of resources a priority for the institution, determined based on sound practices of assessment and acts toward continuous improvement for mission attainment, rather than the institution’s budgetary constraints or financial exigency.

In summary, the application of these recommendations may require a paradigm shift in the entire institution through intentional changes in their strategic plans, resource allocation, operating policies, practices and even the formal and informal reporting structures. In addition, these changes may help leaders in higher education to develop an institution-wide culture that supports assessment, shared responsibility and accountability, and contributes toward building the institution’s capacity to demonstrate and document its overall effectiveness in student learning.

**Recommendations for Future Research**

Further research can be done on each of the four emerging themes or core variables identified in this study, specifically, the relationship between them.
As the study revealed, leaders can directly influence the institutional culture, the allocation of resources, the institution’s planning and assessment processes, and overall institutional effectiveness. Further research can examine the relationship between higher education leadership and institutional culture. Specifically, further research can be conducted on leader characteristics and practices that promote a culture of assessment and accountability. In addition, advance research is needed to examine how institutional leaders can support and facilitate institutional effectiveness. Future research can also examine leadership styles to undercover those that are most appropriate for higher education administration in supporting the effectiveness of an institution.

Researchers can also conduct additional inquiry on the role that culture plays in higher education institutions ability to demonstrate levels of effectiveness in a number of areas related to the institution’s mission, including student learning and achievement among other things.

In addition, the internal processes of the institution, such a planning and assessment, are what institutions used to determine and document their levels of effectiveness. Therefore, researchers can examine internal processes not reviewed in this study, to identify best practices that can generally be applied to higher education institutions to improve the way in which they identify and evidence levels of effectiveness.

This study defined institutional effectiveness based of the requirements of the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges. Reaffirmation of accreditation was used as an indicator of the institutions’ success in demonstrating
institutional effectiveness. This is also an area for further study; additional research can be conducted on the relationship between accrediting agencies’ requirements and institutional practices in higher education.

These inquiries can help educational leaders gain an in-depth understanding of the many variables that can impact institutional practices, performance, and overall attainment of the institution’s mission.
APPENDIX A

Initial Participation Letter (Email Invite)

Dear Administrator:

My name is Tia A. Minnis, a doctoral candidate at Clark Atlanta University, and I am conducting a research study for my dissertation on SACS Commission on Colleges’ Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1, Institutional Effectiveness (IE) and Student Learning. Your institution was selected for this study because you recently completed your ten-year reaffirmation of accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Included in this study are four additional institutions.

The purpose of this research is to gain an understanding of the interaction among internal variables within selected institutions, and to determine how they impact the institutions’ ability to demonstrate effectiveness. Since student learning is a fundamental component in demonstrating mission accomplishment and institutional effectiveness in higher education, this study specifically focuses on the processes that influence SACS Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1. The study is developed to assist institutions improve the way they structure their internal environment and evidence institutional effectiveness to internal and external constituents.

If you agree to participate in this study, you will be asked to (1) consent to participate; (2) complete an online survey; (3) participate in a semi-structured interview either in person or via Skype; and (4) answer follow-up questions (only if necessary). Your participation is voluntary, and your full input is extremely valuable to this process. Please note that the survey and interview(s) are being conducted for research purposes only. Your responses will remain anonymous. Information that would make it possible to identify a participant will not be included in any sort of report that might be published. All research records will be kept private in a locked file, and only the researcher will have access to these records. You can withdraw from the study at any time, and all information collected on your institution will be destroyed immediately.

Clark Atlanta University Institutional Review Board (IRB) requires investigators provide informed consent to the research participants. If you agree to participate in this study, please click on this link to provide your consent and begin the survey:

http://www.snapsurveys.com/swh/surveylogin.asp?k=137830503342&i=2F93B806524A4A92CC1CFD06870E04EECF9433
Please submit responses as soon as possible, preferably no later than September 26. Once you have completed the survey, I will contact you to schedule an interview. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher or Clark Atlanta University.

If you have any questions regarding the study now or later, please contact me at (404) 906-3237 or my dissertation advisor, Dr. Barbra Hill, at (404) 880-6126. For questions related to the integrity of the research, (the rights of research subjects or research-related injuries, where applicable), you are encouraged to contact Dr. Georgianna Bolden at the Office of Sponsored Programs (404 880-6979) or Dr. Paul I. Musey, (404) 880-6829 at Clark Atlanta University.

Thank you in advance for your time and participation!

Tia A. Minnis
Primary Investigator, Doctoral Candidate
Clark Atlanta University
tiaminnis@gmail.com
(404) 906-3237
APPENDIX B

Electronic Participant Consent Form

Primary Investigator: Tia A. Minnis (Doctoral Candidate - Clark Atlanta University)

Title of Study: Demonstrating Effectiveness in Higher Education Through Accreditation: An Analytical Review of How The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges’ Accreditation Standards on Institutional Effectiveness and Student Learning are Impacted by The Internal Environment of Select Institutions

You are invited to participate in a research study focused on Institutional Effectiveness and Student Learning. You were selected as a possible participant because your institution recently completed its ten-year reaffirmation of accreditation with the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges (SACSCOC). Please read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to participate in the study.

Background Information:

The purpose of this study is to gain an understanding of the interaction among internal variables within selected institutions, and to determine how they impact the institutions’ ability to demonstrate effectiveness. This study focuses on SACS Commission on Colleges Comprehensive Standard 3.3.1.1 because student learning is a fundamental component in demonstrating mission accomplishment and institutional effectiveness in higher education. The study is developed to help institutions improve the way they structure their internal environment and evidence institutional effectiveness to internal and external constituents.

Procedures:

If you agree to take part in this study, you will be asked to (1) consent to participate; (2) complete an online survey; (3) participate in a semi-structured interview either in person or via Skype; and (4) answer follow-up questions (only if necessary).

Confidentiality:

Please note that the survey and interview(s) are being conducted for research purposes only. Your responses will remain anonymous. Information that would make it possible to identify a participant will not be included in any sort of report that might be published. Research records will be kept private in a locked file and only the researchers will have access to these records. You can withdraw from the study at any time and all information collected on your institution will be destroyed immediately. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the researcher, or Clark Atlanta University.

IF YOU WISH TO KEEP A COPY OF THIS DOCUMENT FOR YOUR RECORDS, PLEASE PRINT IT NOW BEFORE PROCEEDING.

Consent:

If you agree to participate in the research study, you must "consent to participate" by selecting "I agree to participate in this study". If you do not agree to participate, select "I choose not to participate in this study".
Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers.

☐ I agree to participate in this study.

☐ I chose not to participate in this study.
APPENDIX C

IRB Approval Letter

CLARK ATLANTA UNIVERSITY
Institutional Review Board
Office of Sponsored Programs
September 18, 2013

Ms. Tia A. Minnis <tminnis@cau.edu>
School of Education
Educational Leadership Dept.
Clark Atlanta University
Atlanta, GA 30314

TITLE: Demonstrating Effectiveness in Higher Education Through Accreditation: An Analytical Review of How The Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission on Colleges’ Accreditation Standards on Institutional Effectiveness and Student Learning are impacted by The internal Environment of Select Institutions

Principal Investigator(s): Tia Minnis.
Human Subjects Code Number: HR2013-9-481-1

Dear Ms. Minnis,

The Human Subjects Committee of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) has reviewed your protocol and approved of it as exempt in accordance with 43 CFR 46.101(b)(3).

Your Protocol Approval Code is HR2013-9-481-1/A
Type of Review: Expedited.

This permit will expire on September 17, 2014. Thereafter, continued approval is contingent upon the annual submission of a renewal form to this office, noting any changes in your protocol.

The CAU IRB acknowledges your timely completion of the CIUH IRB Training in Protection of Human Subjects – “Social and Behavioral Sciences Track”. Your certification is valid for two years.

If you have any questions, please contact: Dr. Georgianna Bolden at the Office of Sponsored Programs (404) 880-6979 or Dr. Paul I. Mussey, (404) 880-6829.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Paul I. Mussey, Ph.D.
Chair
IRB: Human Subjects Committee

Office of Sponsored Programs, "Dr. Georgianna Bolden" <gbolden@cau.edu>

221 James P. Browne Drive, S.W. • ATLANTA, GA 30314-4391 • (404) 880-8000

Founded in 1867 by consolidation of Atlanta University, 1851 and Clark College, 1869
APPENDIX D

Institutional Effectiveness Electronic Survey

1. Please indicate the name of your institution

SECTION 1: INSTITUTIONAL LEADERSHIP & ADMINISTRATION

2. Please rate the following questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Not Observed/Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Campus leaders at your institution value and support a culture of assessment on your campus</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus leaders actively participate in the assessment processes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Campus leaders provide adequate guidance and governance for assessment of Institutional Effectiveness (IE)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>There are clearly stated campus policies and procedures for assessment of IE</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employees are held accountable for the execution of assessment duties for their respective programs and activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

7. What roles do your institutional leaders (i.e. presidents, provost, deans, dept. chairs, etc.) play in the process of assessing IE? (Please briefly indicate the role each leader plays regarding assessment)

8. How are employees held accountable for the execution of assessment duties for their respective programs and activities?

SECTION 2: INSTITUTIONAL STRUCTURE FOR PLANNING, ASSESSMENT AND RESEARCH

210
9. Describe the reporting structure of your Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research offices:

10. Would you describe your structure as centralized or decentralized? Please explain.

11. Is there an established point of contact and authority for IE and/or accreditation related activities? Who is it? Why was this person selected?

12. How does the structure of your institution’s Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research offices impact your ability to adequately assess and document IE?

SECTION 3: ALLOCATION OF HUMAN, FISCAL AND PHYSICAL RESOURCES (SUPPORT)

13. Please rate the following questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resources to coordinate and support assessment activities on</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Not Observed/Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
campus are adequate (e.g., administrative support, technical support, facilities and financial support)

The allocation of human capital and financial resources is sufficient to support the campus wide assessment initiatives

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

There is adequate professional development opportunities to ensure appropriate collaboration and ownership for assessment

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

There are adequate training opportunities available to faculty and staff to guide their assessment needs and efforts

☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐

17. How many staff members (include full-time, part-time, student workers) do you have in each of your Planning, Assessment, and Institutional Research offices?

18. Are your PAR departments adequately staffed and funded to carry out your daily functions?

☐ Yes
☐ No

SECTION 4: USE OF TECHNOLOGY IN KEY IE AREAS

19. Please rate the following questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Not Observed/Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>We employ technology to streamline our planning and assessment processes</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our electronic planning and assessment system adequately meets the institution’s needs</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Our planning and assessment technology is user-friendly and widely adopted throughout the organization</td>
<td>☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐ ☐</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

22. What electronic platform(s) does your institution use for data collection, storage, assessment and sharing?
23. How would you describe your user’s (faculty/staff) levels of knowledge with the assessment system?

24. How often do your users generally access your assessment system?

25. What is your electronic system used for? Please check all that apply

- Assessment of Program SLOs
- Assessment of Institutional Learning Outcomes (Gen Ed)
- Course Assessment
- Curriculum Mapping
- Periodic Program Reviews
- Strategic Planning
- Annual Assessment
- Program Reviews
- Accreditation Preparation
- Non-Academic Assessment
- Closing the Loop
- Data Collection/Archiving
- Report Sharing/Analytics
- Student Portfolio Assessment
- Rubric Assessment
- Other

26. How do you encourage users to actively assess their learning outcomes, program, and activities via your assessment system?
SECTION 5: INSTITUTIONAL ASSESSMENT PRACTICES

27. Please rate the following questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Not Observed/Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>There is a clear culture of collaboration and shared responsibility within the institution</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goals, including learning outcomes, are clearly articulated by programs and services at every level: institutional, department, program, and course</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appropriate on-going systematic assessment processes have been implemented across campus</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment results provide convincing evidence that the institution is achieving its mission and goals, including key learning outcomes</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment results are being used to inform and/or improve short- and long-range planning, decision making, and allocate resources at the institution</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment results are shared in useful forms and discussed widely with appropriate constituents</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The institution has sufficient engagement (faculty and staff) and momentum to sustain its assessment processes</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Most constituents understand the institutional assessment processes and practices</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>All assessment processes are reviewed regularly and revised when necessary</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
<td>O</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

36. How is student learning documented at your institution? Describe briefly.
37. How is Institutional Effectiveness as a whole measured and documented at your institution?

38. Are there any significant gaps in your assessment processes, such as key areas where no assessment plans have been developed or managed consistently or the results have not been used productively?

39. What would you describe as some of the major obstacles in your assessment and documentation of student learning and institutional effectiveness?

SECTION 6: INSTITUTIONAL ACCREDITATION PREPARATION PERIOD

40. Please rate the following questions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sufficient time was allocate for the reaffirmation of accreditation review process</th>
<th>Strongly Agree</th>
<th>Agree</th>
<th>Neither Agree Nor Disagree</th>
<th>Disagree</th>
<th>Strongly Disagree</th>
<th>Not Observed/Not Applicable</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>All data required to complete the Certification of Compliance Report (CCR) was easily accessible</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The accreditation reaffirmation process was very difficult/demanding</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Overall the accreditation reaffirmation process was very rewarding for my institution</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
<td>0</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
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