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Embracing A Culture Of Evidence: A Phenomenological Study Of Faculty Experience Within A Transitioning Assessment Culture

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EMBRACING A CULTURE OF EVIDENCE: A PHENOMENOLOGICAL STUDY OF FACULTY EXPERIENCE WITHIN A TRANSITIONING ASSESSMENT CULTURE

Abstract

This phenomenological study sought to give voice to the lived experiences of faculty within a transitioning assessment culture at an institution of higher education accredited by the New England Association of Colleges and Schools (NEASC). Current literature concerning outcomes assessment (OA) in higher education is highly focused on the need for campuses to foster a robust and pervasive culture around assessment, often termed a *culture of evidence.* The study site provided a unique opportunity to examine this phenomenon as it was at the mid-point of a multi-year initiative focused on transforming institutional assessment culture. During the study, full-time faculty at the non-tenure, non-union institution who self-identified as being more engaged in OA than in the past, were recruited as study participants and asked to share their perspectives during hour long semi-structured interviews. Data resulting from the interviews were analyzed using Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Analysis of findings revealed that participants shared a deep sense of investment in their roles as educators, linking their work with OA to the refinement of their professional practice and to efforts to ensure continuous improvement of academic programs and the institution as a whole. Participants cited collaborative opportunities with peers, leadership of the change initiative, and availability of resources, as critical to fostering their own growing sense of engagement with OA and the continuing assessment culture change initiative.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

In recent years, a single word is largely responsible for creating much of the stress and anxiety in the halls of academia. The word is: accountability (Evans, 2010; Kuh, et al., 2015; Powell, 2013). The tensions created by this word are palpable throughout higher education. Accountability felt by administration struggling to produce the evidence of effectiveness which will meet the ever-increasing demands from accreditors and other external stakeholders (Fuller, Henderson, & Bustamante, 2015; Guetterman & Mitchell, 2015; Kezar, 2013). It is on the minds of faculty members who wonder where the time to collect evidence will come from, while worrying that negative results may be used against them (Ebersole, 2009; Emil & Cress, 2014; Kramer, 2009; Tagg, 2012). While many continue to hope that the accountability movement will die if given enough time, one need only consider the current climate of K-12 education to realize that accountability and its close cousin, assessment, are here to stay (Kuh, et al., 2015; Suskie, 2015).

The reality is that while reputation and student grades were once considered sufficient to determine quality, today's educational environment requires institutions of higher education to engage in activities that will gather evidence of effectiveness to withstand the scrutiny of diverse stakeholders (Dill, 2014, p. 54). Measures of effectiveness such as retention rates, graduation rates, and satisfaction surveys provide easily quantifiable data but little direct information about the effectiveness of curriculum or instruction (Kuh, et al., 2015). Evaluation of curriculum effectiveness is best achieved through outcomes assessment (OA), which can provide direct information about how well students have attained the knowledge, skills, and behaviors intended by a program of study (Grassian, 2013; Leaman, 2008; Maki, 2010). Best practice further

requires the establishment of a feedback loop, through which continuous improvement is pursued (Banta & Pike, 2012; Hutchings, 2011; Leimer, 2009).

This is where the challenge begins. Many institutions, in response to external pressures, adopt administratively-driven approaches to OA resulting in processes that do little to engage faculty as partners in continuous improvement (Dugan, 2004, p. 236). In contrast, the ideal OA process is one in which assessment work is pursued as a natural outgrowth of institutional curiosity (Maki, 2010). As evidence of student learning is collected, it is collaboratively interpreted by faculty and administration, and then leveraged in pursuit of institutional improvement (Fuller & Skidmore, 2014; Kuh, et al., 2015; Ndoye & Parker, 2010; Suskie, 2015). In such a *culture of evidence*, accountability is viewed as an internal commitment, rather than as an externally imposed mandate (Banta & Palomba, 2015).

The key to establishing a manageable, meaningful, and sustainable OA process is the engagement of the faculty as owners and drivers of the process (Allen, Noel, Rienzi, & McMillin, 2002; Hutchings, 2011; Kuh, et al., 2015; Maki, 2010; Ndoye & Parker, 2010; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). However, this is not easily achieved in an atmosphere in which there is distrust of the assessment initiatives, and in which faculty feel ill-prepared to participate (Marrs, 2009; Tagg, 2012). Additionally, academic administrators often find that efforts aimed at transforming local assessment culture have limited impact, despite carefully crafted initiatives (Ebersole, 2009; Hernon & Dugan, 2004; Meek, Runshe, Young, Embree, & Riner, 2015).

This phenomenological study sought to understand faculty experiences within an institution pursuing assessment culture change and by extension provide context and insight for any institution intent on moving toward establishing a campus-wide culture of evidence. The researcher serves as the director of outcomes assessment at a regionally accredited institution

which is actively working toward transformation of its assessment culture. This provided an uncommon opportunity to explore in-progress perspectives. For the past two years, efforts have been focused on moving the assessment culture from one of resistance and compliance to one in which the OA process is perceived as valuable, purposeful, and engaging. The intent of this study was to provide insight into the factors that serve to support and sustain faculty engagement with OA practice and which lead to the embracing of a culture of evidence.

Statement of the Problem

Understanding the factors that promote faculty engagement with OA is critically important, especially for institutions actively working toward a campus culture that values such work (Emil & Cress, 2014; Evans, 2010; Jonson & Thompson, 2013). Answering the call for accountability leads institutions of higher education to establish mechanisms to generate the evidence and action-taking required (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Kezar, 2013). Ideally, faculty are full partners and have substantial voice in this process. When faculty are full partners, continuous improvement and refinement of professional practice directly result from the their active engagement in the assessment feedback loop (Haviland, Turley, & Shin, 2011; Kieke, Moroz, & Gort, 2007; Suskie, 2015). However, for many institutions this is not the case and for a variety of reasons faculty do not engage in the assessment process. The focus of this study is to gain an understanding of the faculty experience of engagement in the OA process within an emerging culture of evidence as expressed by the faculty voice.

According to Emil and Cress (2014), "relatively little is known about the factors that inhibit and facilitate faculty engagement in programme [sic] and curricular assessment" (p. 534). Similarly, a number of authors have criticized existing research focused on assessment and faculty engagement as being overly case study based and call for studies that result in applicable

theories (Fuller & Skidmore, 2014; Kezar, 2013; Ndoye & Parker, 2010). While this study did not seek to generate a theory, the insights gained have the potential to provide much-needed context on the faculty voice and experience, specifically what means to be a faculty member immersed in an institution seeking a culture of evidence.

Research Questions

This study focused on the following research question: What is the meaning of lived experiences of full-time faculty members within an institution of higher education working toward establishing a campus-wide culture of evidence? The following sub-questions further guided the inquiry:

- How do faculty perceive the process of institutional assessment culture change?
- What are the faculty-perceived barriers to engagement with OA process and practice?
- What role do institutional vision and perceived purposefulness of OA practice serve in fostering faculty engagement with an emerging culture of evidence?
- What role do collaboration and a sense of process ownership play in fostering faculty engagement?
- How does access to and availability of resources influence faculty engagement and a culture of evidence?

These questions align with the conceptual framework of the study as they guided the inquiry to consider the phenomenon of faculty engagement in OA both internally with regard to faculty perceptions and valuing of OA work and also externally by the conditions and environmental factors created by administration (Bresciani, 2011; Meek, et al., 2015).

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this phenomenological study was to describe the experiences of full-time faculty members who self-identified as feeling more engaged in OA practice than in the past within a transitioning institutional assessment culture. In particular, insights into the factors that help faculty move toward invested participation in OA were sought, as expressed from the faculty perspective and voice. Rather than testing whether or not specific interventions drive change, the inquiry centered on conditions or factors that faculty identify as promoting their engagement. In the course of the study, some information about factors that result in faculty disengagement was also revealed. The knowledge gained from this study has the potential to fill the void identified by Emil and Cress (2014), Kezar (2013), and Fuller, Henderson, and Bustamante (2015), each of whom call for additional research in this area of inquiry.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this study was rooted in social constructivism which holds that meaning is derived from the interaction of experiences and ideas within an individual's reality (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). Additionally, the study is anchored in the concept that the phenomenon of faculty engagement in OA is driven both internally with regard to faculty perceptions and valuing of OA work and externally by the conditions and environmental factors created by administration and external stakeholders (Bresciani, 2011; Meek, et al., 2015). This framework suggests that an institution's ability to transform its assessment culture strongly connects to its ability to communicate the message that OA is valued, supported and faculty-driven in ways that faculty perceive as geniune and authentic (Fuller, et al., 2015; Guetterman & Mitchell, 2015; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003).

Assumptions, limitations, scope

The following assumptions were made for the purposes of the study:

- Faculty selected for the study had personal experience with the transitioning assessment culture at the institution.
- Interview participants understood the interview questions and were honest in their responses.
- Experiences shared by faculty are representative of the full-time faculty population engaged in OA practice at the institution.
- Themes extracted from interview transcripts were accurately interpreted by the researcher.

The study was conducted at a regionally accredited, not-for-profit institution of higher education at which the researcher serves as the Director of Outcomes Assessment. It is a limitation of the study that data was collected from a single institution, which may lessen applicability of findings to other settings. The sample was constructed to ensure appropriate representation of the faculty population, including various disciplines and exposure to the on-going change initiative. Faculty who serve on the university level OA committee were excluded from the study in an effort to capture the experiences of average faculty member. Data were collected through hour long semi-structured interviews which were transcribed and analyzed to extract emergent themes. Interview questions were, in part, informed by the 2014 Annual Survey of Assessment Culture (Fuller & Beck, 2015). The use of this existing survey instrument as the foundation of the interview framework provided additional focus and direction.

Significance

This study has the potential to address a gap in the existing literature by providing additional understanding about the perceptions of faculty regarding OA, their role in the OA process, and the transitioning institutional assessment culture. Specifically, the research targeted the identification of factors that faculty felt led them to embrace OA within an emerging culture of evidence. Documenting the faculty-lived experience may provide a unique perspective on what is most central to the engagement process and the transformation of OA culture.

At its core, the assessment movement is intent on ensuring accountability for student learning (Dill, 2014, p. 54). The existence of a pervasive culture of evidence on campus is often seen as a marker of an institutional commitment to student achievement (Kuh, et al., 2015). An institution that seeks to meet the demands of accountability through honest critique and investigation, new frameworks, and action-taking that result in greater equity and opportunity for students is consistent with transformative practices and transformative leadership (Sheilds, 2010, p. 559). As a result, this study also connects to several elements of Transformational Leadership Theory advanced by Shields. The faculty narratives of experiences within such an environment have the potential to inform practice for institutions seeking to transform assessment culture in ways that are authentic to this vision.

Definition of Terms

Accountability: the responsibility of institutions to demonstrate the effectiveness of academic programs to internal and external stakeholders (Suskie, 2015).

Accreditation: the "process of external quality review created and used by higher education to scrutinize colleges, universities and programs for quality assurance and quality improvement" (Eaton, 2012, p. 1).

Assessment: the process of collecting, reviewing and acting upon information about academic programs, with the intention of improving student learning (Marchese, 1987 as cited in Marrs, 2009).

Classroom assessment: direct information about student learning and teaching effectiveness obtained by individual instructors in the course of teaching (Evans, 2010).

Closing the loop: See *feedback loop*.

Culture of compliance: an institutional culture in which assessment work is administratively owned and externally-oriented, especially in an effort to satisfy regulatory demands (Kuh, et al., 2015; Wehlburg, 2013).

Culture of evidence: an institutional culture in which assessment practice is integral to the work process and is pursued as a natural outgrowth of institutional curiosity. The results of this work are collaboratively interpreted by faculty and administration and leveraged in pursuit of institutional improvement (Fuller & Skidmore, 2014; Kuh, et al., 2015; Ndoye & Parker, 2010; Suskie, 2015).

External stakeholders: individuals or groups that are not members of a specific institution of higher learning, but to whom the institution has an obligation of transparency in reporting and the sharing of information. This obligation may be formal (regulatory) or informal (moral) (Suskie, 2015).

Feedback loop: a formal process through which evidence of student achievement is collected, analyzed, and acted upon in pursuit of continuous improvement (Banta & Pike, 2012; Hutchings, 2011; Leimer, 2009).

Formative assessment: assessment conducted during a student's program of study to determine progress toward attainment of program or institutional outcomes (Maki, 2010).

Institutional-level assessment: assessment practice that is broadly focused on the entire institution and largely employs quantitative measure such as retention and graduation rates as performance indicators (Evans, 2010).

Institutional effectiveness: assessment focused on the effectiveness of the entire institution of higher education toward meeting its articulated institutional goals rather than individual programs, departments, or initiatives (Suskie, 2015).

Internal stakeholders: individuals or groups that are members of a specific institution of higher learning and directly impacted by the institution's decisions and practices (Suskie, 2015).

Outcome assessment (OA): assessment practice focused on determining if students have obtained knowledge, skills, and behaviors intended by a program of study upon graduation from that program (Grassian, 2013; Leaman, 2008).

Program-level assessment: similar to OA–assessment practice directed at determining how well students have attained the intended knowledge, skills, and behaviors intended by a program of study (Leaman, 2008).

Program Outcomes: statements that articulate the specific knowledge, skills, and behaviors that the curriculum of an academic program is intended to support students toward attaining as they matriculate.

Scholarship of teaching and learning: the process through which faculty approach teaching in ways that are informed by the scholarship of the discipline, while simultaneously seeking to gather information about student learning which refines personal practice and yields insights which foster dialog with peers and contribute to the broader body of knowledge (Hutchings, 2011).

Summative assessment: assessment conducted at the end of a student's program of study to measure the achievement of program or institutional outcomes (Maki, 2010).

Conclusion

Within the realm of higher education, the concepts of outcomes assessment, accountability, and accreditation have become thoroughly entangled, as a conversation about any one element inadvertently leads to others and ultimately to a discussions of student learning (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Kuh, et al., 2015; Suskie, 2015). Evidence of student learning is most often generated through OA, as academic programs seek to determine the degree to which students have obtained the knowledge, skills, and attitudes intended by the completion of the degree program (Maki, 2010, p. 3). Instituting a campus culture in which faculty are willing and eager participants in the OA process continues to prove difficult for many institutions (Banta & Pike, 2012; Bresciani, 2011; Emil & Cress, 2014; Grassian, 2013; Kuh, et al., 2015). This leads many to struggle with what Welsh and Metcalf (2003) described as a disturbing paradox in which as the pressures to engage in effectiveness activities grow, support for the work diminishes (p. 34). The aim of this study was to provide a foundation for understanding the factors that lead faculty to embrace assessment and accountability that can be leveraged to successfully transform institutional culture.

The subsequent chapters have been constructed to further illuminate the study. Chapter 2 provides a review of the relevant literature, including context of the contemporary environment within which institutions of higher education are operating, insight into current OA practice and a discussion of the centrality of the faculty role. The research methodology is presented in Chapter 3 and includes a thorough explanation of how the study was conducted. Chapter 4

provides a summary of the study findings. Finally, Chapter 5 provides analysis of the findings, a discussion of implications and recommendations for future inquiry.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

In August 2013, President Obama added yet another voice to the rising chorus of those seeking to hold colleges and universities accountable for ensuring that students learn what they should during their course of study (The White House, 2013). While the President's suggestion of creating a national report card on educational quality was a new direction in the conversation, accrediting bodies have long required that colleges and schools demonstrate institutional effectiveness (Eaton, 2012, p. 3). Institutional effectiveness includes a number of activities such as evaluation of student learning outcomes and operational outcomes, program review, surveys, and others measurements aimed at helping institutions determine how well they are performing (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003, p. 34). With regard to student learning, the demonstration of effectiveness relies upon the process of Outcomes Assessment (OA) through which the academic programs seek to determine the degree to which students have obtained the knowledge, skills, and attitudes intended by the completion of the degree program (Maki, 2010, p. 3). However, best practice dictates that the measuring of student performance be followed by analysis and action-taking driven by faculty as they pursue continuous improvement (Banta & Blaich, 2010; Fuller & Skidmore, 2014; Kuh, et al., 2015). Instituting a campus culture in which faculty are willing and eager participants in the OA process continues to prove difficult for many institutions (Guetterman & Mitchell, 2015, p. 4).

This literature review examines the role of accreditation, accountability, institutional culture, and motivation as relates to faculty engagement with OA within institutions of higher education in the United States. The topic of engaging faculty with the culture of evidence is explored using a multi-pronged approach. First, an exploration of the interrelated topics of

outcomes assessment, accountability, and accreditation is presented providing context on the current higher education landscape. Within this initial discussion, definitions of assessment, as well as an overview of the origins of the assessment movement within higher education, are provided. An exploration of the form and role of culture as a variable in transforming and shaping institutional OA practice follows. Next, faculty centrality in the assessment process is examined, as are common barriers to engagement with OA. The section also provides an overview of faculty motivation theory. Finally, to provide additional perspective, a series of models and best practices for faculty-driven assessment practice are drawn from the literature and recent research. The conclusion of the review provides a summary of prevailing themes, the conceptual framework illustrating an assessment culture continuum, and presents a rationale for conducting the inquiry.

Outcomes Assessment, Accountability, and Accreditation

Outcomes assessment, accountability, and accreditation are inextricably connected in today's world of higher education. In the United States, these connections have been strongly forged by external pressures, in the form of accreditation standards and regulations instituted by individual states and the federal government. The impetus for this pressure has been and continues to be focused on ensuring the quality of higher education and student achievement (Ndoye & Parker, 2010; Shavelson, 2007).

Outcomes assessment

Assessment is a broad subject area and includes both formative (along the way) and summative (at the conclusion) assessment. Assessment has been defined as the process of collecting information about academic programs, reviewing it and then acting upon it, with an ultimate goal of improving student learning (Marchese, 1987 cited in Marrs, 2009, p.1). In her

work, Evans (2010) made the distinction between three levels of assessment, classroom level, program level or general education level, and institutional level (p. 1). Each of these tiers of assessment provides important information about how well students are attaining the intended learning outcomes. However, the scope and scale vary. For example, classroom assessment provides faculty members with direct information about how well teaching strategies are working. Institutional level assessment, by contrast, is broad and often uses quantitative measures such as retention and graduation rates as indicators of performance. Program level assessment sits between these two extremes, focusing on a holistic understanding of program effectiveness (p. 1).

OA particularly aligns with the "program or general education level assessment" (Evans, 2010, p. 1), which focuses on student learning within a specific program of study or specialty area. OA has a narrowed focus in seeking to determine if students have obtained the knowledge, skills, and behaviors intended by the program of study upon graduation from that program (Grassian, 2013; Leaman, 2008). This is where the link to accountability is forged. If a student completes a degree program successfully, it is reasonable to expect that he or she has also attained the intended outcomes of that program and the outcomes assessment process provides the evidence to demonstrate this (Dill, 2014, p. 54).

Accountability

Accountability is founded on the idea that institutions should be able to demonstrate the quality of the education they provide to external audiences. Leaman (2008) linked this to the accountability movement in public education, which gained traction in the 1980's (p. 12). The accountability movement saw a dramatic increase in the use of assessment through testing, strict graduation requirements, and other standards (Lazerson, Wagener & Shumanis cited in Leaman,

2008, p. 12). In the realm of higher education, Powell (2013) identified the federal government as a primary driver of the accountability conversation (p. 57). This is evidenced through various commission reports, such as the one from the Spellings Commission in 2006, which questioned the quality of higher education in the U.S. and called for increased transparency regarding student achievement of intended learning outcomes (Powell, 2013, p. 60). Notable legacies of the report issued by the commission include efforts to regulate accrediting agencies through the Higher Education Opportunity Act (HEOA) and general distrust of U.S. accreditation as a certain guarantee of institutional quality (Suskie, 2015, pp. 16-17).

While a well-instituted and well-communicated OA process answers the call for accountability by providing institutions with the evidence to demonstrate educational quality and improvement, institutions too often have focused on easily defined outputs for graduating classes such as employment rates rather than actual evidence of student learning (Hernon & Dugan, 2004, p. 11). It should be noted that while efforts to measure student mastery of college content are not new, what is new is the pressure to use and share the resulting data as evidence (Shavelson, 2007, p. 26). According to Powell (2013), "the public has become less interested in the quality of faculty scholarship and much more interested in institutional benchmarks of quality related to student outcomes" (p. 56).

The notion of accountability also brings with it the idea of comparability, as any evidence must be viewed in context, rather than isolation. However, the lack of common curriculum, learning outcomes and standards within the U.S. higher educational system makes this challenging at best. As Green (2011) stressed, the shared definition of what constitutes a college degree within American higher education is limited to credit counts and major components such as general education, major studies, and electives (p.19). Conversations about the need to ensure

that degrees from U.S. institutions can compete on the world stage have led to initiatives such as the Degree Qualifications Program (DQP) and the Tuning USA Project, both instituted by the Lumina Foundation. These projects aimed to provide greater alignment of learning outcomes across institutions for specific degree programs and ensure that curricula support attainment of the defined outcomes (Green, 2011, p. 20). Understanding the value of accountability evidence requires a framework and a frame of reference. Accreditation, at least in part, provides this structure (Dill, 2014, p. 56).

Accreditation

The connection of assessment and accountability is clearly reflected in the numerous standards articulated by accrediting bodies that explicitly require institutions to show evidence of formal processes designed to collect, analyze, and use data on student achievement (Dill, 2014; Evans, 2010; Green, 2011; Leaman, 2008; Powell, 2013; Shavelson, 2007). These standards continue to be generated in direct response to public and private stakeholders who demand that investments made in higher education be made wisely and that accrediting bodies perform due diligence as gatekeepers (Eaton, 2012; Suskie, 2015). Without question, colleges and universities are increasingly required to be more accountable about what students are expected to be able to demonstrate upon graduation. The challenge for institutions is how to fulfill this demand while staying true to institutional mission and ensuring an authentic, meaningful process (Suskie, 2015, p. 35).

Outcomes Assessment and Institutional Culture

The external pressures discussed previously have led to increased emphasis on outcomes assessment at the vast majority of institutions (Kuh, et al., 2015, p. 201). The challenge however, has been how to best conduct OA within existing structures as well as how to ensure that

evidence is gathered in ways that connect with the distinct culture of the institution (Grassian, 2013, p. 169). To achieve this goal, OA must be viewed as a process in which evidence of student achievement is collected, analyzed, and acted upon (Banta & Pike, 2012; Hutchings, 2011; Leimer, 2009). This is often termed the feedback loop which has an end goal of continuous improvement rather than mere accountability (Smith, 2005, p. 8). The documentation of this feedback loop and the pursuit of continuous improvement becomes the evidence presented to internal and external stakeholders to answer the question of accountability (Grassian, 2013, p. 158). The central role of this feedback loop should not be understated, as the lack of a formal and vigorous feedback loop is often a substantial barrier to successful OA practice (Hernon & Dugan, 2004, p. 52). Kuh, et al. (2015) use the analogy of "harvesting results" to illustrate the central role of the feedback loop, noting that for any assessment process to be successful it must be relevant, engaging and yield useful results (p. 15). Making this a reality within an institution requires more than policy and procedure. It also requires an environment or culture in which such work is valued and pervasive (Ndoye & Parker, 2010, p. 29).

Form and role of culture as a variable

According to Bresciani (as cited in Ndoye & Parker, 2010), establishing shared language and customary practice surrounding assessment institution-wide is a critical variable. Within OA circles, the term *culture of evidence* is frequently used, and it is not uncommon to hear campus leadership speak about the desire to foster such a culture on campus. A culture of evidence has been defined as one in which the assessment process is integral to the work process and is pursued, not as an external mandate, but rather as a natural outgrowth of institutional curiosity, and serves to inform the joint pursuit of excellence (Kezar, 2013; Kieke, Moroz, & Gort, 2007). Another hallmark of a culture of evidence is the active and collaborative engagement of faculty

in the assessment process in pursuit of excellence and institutional improvement (Fuller & Skidmore, 2014; Kuh, et al., 2015; Ndoye & Parker, 2010; Suskie, 2015). It is through this shared understanding, practice, and valuing that the culture is fostered, and the community investment in the process grows (Leimer, 2009).

However, when the outcomes assessment process is not deeply integrated into the structures of the institution, there is a significant risk of fostering a culture of compliance (Kuh, et al., 2015, p. 5). OA then becomes something that is only attended to as an accreditation visit draws near and is always someone else's responsibility (Leimer, 2009, p. 7). Hernon & Dugan (2004) described this focus on compliance as *accountability orientation* (p. 236). They caution that this often leads to shallow change and a checklist mentality, rather a deeply held valuing of the process and its potential to drive meaningful change. Furthermore, in an effort to ensure that assessment work gets done, many institutions have reinforced the idea that OA is only important as a compliance issue by locating responsibility for the process in institutional research or within administrative areas responsible for accreditation (Wehlburg, 2013, p. 2). Unfortunately, this approach often sends the unintended message that OA is not directly connected to the faculty role, which serves to weaken efforts aimed at fostering a culture of evidence.

For many institutions, the question and challenge lie in ensuring movement toward and sustaining a campus climate that engenders meaningful assessment practice. In 2003, The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NEASC) published the Assessment Culture Matrix based on information extracted from accreditation visit team reports. This matrix defined distinct stages of assessment culture development–Beginning Implementation, Making Progress in Implementation, and Maturing Stages of Continuous Improvement–and noted that the model should be construed as comprised

of "fluid and dynamic characteristics rather than a uniform structure" (The Higher Learning Commission of the North Central Association of Colleges and Schools, 2003, p. 1). However, while various contributors to culture are addressed–*institutional culture, shared responsibility, institutional support, and efficacy of assessment*–the definition of culture is not explicitly articulated within the matrix (p. 80). As a result, while the matrix presented desirable characteristics for institutions to aspire toward, it provided less in the way of definitive or actionable guidance.

This lack of a clear definition of culture provides an illustration of what Kezar (2013) identified as a substantial weakness in current OA research (p. 190). Culture, leadership, and organizational policy are commonly cited important elements in transforming institutional assessment practice, but their roles are not well-understood (p. 190). The necessary response to this deficit, according to Kezar, is targeted research focusing on how these structures "support implementation and unearth underlying dynamics that lead to change" (p. 191). While the existing research provides ample coverage of successful practice through single case studies, Kezar advocated for future studies to take a more disciplined approach to "…tease out the many conditions that facilitate the implementation of assessment programs" (p. 201).

Fuller and Skidmore (2014) also found a deficit in the literature regarding theoretical constructs to illuminate assessment culture, which they concluded has hindered full understanding. They attributed this to a lack of critical inquiry on the part of those engaged in assessment work and cautioned that much of what is accepted as best practice has not been adequately tested (p. 11). Similarly, Ndoye and Parker (2010) noted that while academic institutions are eager for scholarship focused on what is necessary to sustain a culture of evidence on campus, little has been provided to fulfill this need (p. 30). This is a need that must

be addressed if institutions are to successfully foster a culture of evidence marked by deep faculty engagement in the OA process.

Faculty Centrality

As faculty are responsible for the development and delivery of the curriculum, it is logical to engage them in actively working toward a culture of evidence (Banta & Pike, 2012, p. 52). This is further supported by the fact that although "accrediting bodies hold institutions accountable for educational quality, student learning outcomes assessment is primarily a program- and course-based effort" which requires extensive faculty involvement (Hernon & Dugan, 2004, p. 240). There are numerous and diverse aspects of OA with which the faculty can and should be active participants. These aspects include identifying, designing, measuring, reporting data, analyzing results, and determining appropriate actions based upon that analysis.

According to Emil & Cress (2014), "faculty participation in assessment in essential to creating faculty-owned change processes in higher education" (p. 549). Kuh et al. (2015), cited the importance of ensuring that the OA process is strongly connected to the scholarship of teaching and learning and professional development (p. 97). Heron & Dugan (2004) presented the idea that assessment focus should be aligned with what faculty value within their discipline (p. 240). Banta & Pike (2012) stressed the importance of keeping the assessment process transparent and directed toward improving student learning, rather than focused on the task of assessment (p. 54). Evans (2010) found highly engaged faculty valued OA for its ability to improve teaching and learning practices and for the opportunities it provided to collaborate with colleagues (p. 150). Similarly, Ferguson (2007) stated that assessment initiatives cannot move forward without significant faculty investment in the process (p. 81). Grassian (2013) stressed the critical role of faculty in implementing and directing the process in ways that substantially

benefit their professional practice, student learning, and organizational effectiveness (p. 170). The literature clearly supports the centrality of the faculty to the OA practice and process.

Faculty perspectives and motivation factors

The establishment of a successful OA process and a culture of evidence is largely based on an engaged and participating faculty; however, this is an area in which many institutions struggle (Banta, 2005; Jonson & Thompson, 2013; Leimer, 2009; Smith, 2005). In the 2015 Faculty Survey of Assessment Culture, faculty were asked to indicate the primary driver of assessment initiatives at their campus from a list of options. While 38% of faculty selected *improving student learning*, 55% chose responses related to external mandates such as accreditation and accountability (Fuller & Beck, 2015). The same study found that only a quarter of respondents were aware of assessment success stories within their institutions (Fuller & Beck, 2015). Completion of the survey was voluntary and institutions choosing to participate were likely to have an established assessment process already instituted. This may have resulted in higher levels of favorable responses regarding experiences with campus assessment process.

While engagement may be the goal, the reality is that in many cases faculty are resistant to the OA process and may even actively work against it (Bresciani, 2011; Ebersole, 2009; Grassian, 2013; Kramer, 2009; Tagg, 2012). Palomba and Banta (1999, as cited in Evans, 2001) discussed the need to address "the three R's of responsibility, resources, and rewards" as central to overcoming faculty resistance (p. 8). The following discussion of the phenomenon of faculty resistance to OA within higher education has been framed using this model.

Responsibility. Kramer (2009) identified several reasons for faculty resistance, including concerns that OA will interfere with academic freedom, that OA process will result in a loss of autonomy, and fears that assessment results will be held against them (p. 8). While

faculty are generally comfortable with being responsible for teaching, often they are less comfortable with being held accountable for student learning, over which they feel they have somewhat limited control. Simply put, they do not want to be punished if their students do not perform well (Kramer, 2009, p. 8).

Tagg (2012) tied resistance to engaging in OA to faculty concerns that the process and results gathered will directly impact faculty roles and responsibilities negatively (p. 9). Banta & Pike (2012) considered faculty trust of the assessment methodology as a key factor in fostering engagement (p. 48). For some, the collaborative nature of OA work, which requires collaboration amongst the faculty, is out of step with the perceived *culture of autonomy* that exists in most institutions (Evans, 2010, p. 3). The concern is that attempts to measure student learning will result in standardized lessons and assessments that will be intrusive and disruptive to the relationship between teacher and student. Additionally, the idea of discussing professional practice rather than subject matter expertise is something unfamiliar and not highly valued by faculty (Hernon & Dugan, 2004; Grassian, 2013; Hutchings, 2011; Tagg, 2012). As a result, two important elements of the feedback loop–the gathering of information and use of the information to refine practice and curriculum–are impacted and further distance faculty from the OA process (Tagg, 2012, p. 14).

Resources. A lack of understanding about assessment and its purpose is an additional driver of resistance (Banta & Pike, 2012; Evans, 2010; Grassian, 2013; Hutchings, 2011; Powell, 2013; Tagg, 2012). Rare is the discipline-based doctoral program that focuses on pedagogy in addition to research and content expertise (Banta & Pike, 2012; Ferguson, 2007; Grassian, 2013; Hutchings, 2011; see also Marrs, 2009; Smith, 2005; Tagg, 2012; Wehlburg, 2013). The result is a faculty that is ill-prepared to engage in OA initiatives in a meaningful and contributive manner.

This lack of understanding has been seen by many as an indicator of the need for additional professional development to support faculty engagement in OA (Grassian, 2013; Kramer, 2009; Wehlburg, 2013). Additional resource barriers identified in the literature include a lack of time to engage in a broad range of OA activities, and a lack of financial support necessary to keep OA from becoming an unfunded mandate dictated by campus administration (Bresciani, 2011, p. 6).

Rewards. A perceived lack of support and time required to participate in OA work often serves as additional barrier (Marrs, 2009, p. 2). In such cases, OA is viewed as "uncompensated additional responsibility" (Kramer, 2009, p. 8). At a time when faculty already feel the pressures to publish or perish such additional responsibilities are not welcome. This is further complicated by the fact that faculty reward systems for tenure and promotion often do not value assessment work, meaning there is little incentive for faculty to engage (Bresciani, 2011; Hutchings, 2011).

Emil and Cress (2014) studied faculty perspectives and engagement in OA using the work of Blackburn and Lawrence (1995) on faculty motivation. The model created by Blackburn and Lawrence identifies the "degree of alignment between personal values and institutional priorities" (p. 15) central to determining faculty actions and decisions. The results of the Emil and Cress (2014) study indicated that faculty participation in assessment work increased when there was clear understanding that the OA process was highly valued by the institution and when they experienced positive feelings (personal reward) as a result of engaging in the work. Personal rewards were defined as both intrinsic as well as actual compensation, further reinforcing the idea that a firm institutional commitment to supporting OA is a necessary component of establishing a culture of evidence (Emil & Cress, 2014, p. 536).

The question and challenge then become how to address these concerns and encourage faculty investment in the OA process. How can these barriers to engagement be overcome?

Rodgers, Grays, Fulcher, and Jurich (2013) noted that faculty resistance increases when assessment practice is poorly implemented and is perceived as lacking purpose. However, when institutions engage in sound and purposeful practice, faculty receptivity to and engagement with assessment tends to increase (Ebersole, 2009; Emil & Cress, 2014; Guetterman & Mitchell, 2015; Haviland, Turley, & Shin, 2011). Maki's (2010) Principles for Inclusive Commitment of Assessment reflect this idea as well, stressing the need for institutions to establish assessment practice that is aligned, integrated, and pervasive (p. 9).

Fostering a Culture of Evidence: Emerging Themes and Research

Zubrow's (2012) discussion of strategies used by Granite State College (GSC) to engage adjunct faculty provides some important insight into effective strategies. GSC relies heavily on approximately 300 adjunct faculty members per year to deliver its traditional, hybrid, and on-line degree programs (p. 78). The challenge for GSC became ensuring that adjunct faculty members were fully aligned with the institution's core value of outcomes-based education. Using a case study approach, Zubrow described multiple strategies that were successful in achieving this goal. These included ongoing professional development programs, paying faculty stipends for engaging in OA work, and recruiting a core team of Lead Assessment Faculty as campus OA advocates (p. 78). A coordinated communication effort in the form of open letters to faculty was also used to educate faculty on OA, address issues, and share personal insights. Zubrow credits this approach as being particularly effective in assisting GSC in moving away from a culture of compliance and toward one of active engagement.

Many of the strategies used by GSC were funded at least in part through several multi-year grants. This provided GSC with resources to invest in rewarding and recognizing faculty without taxing existing organizational budgets. However, there is a risk inherent in relying on

grant funding to support such a culture change, and that is whether or not the change can be sustained after the funding has ended. While a grant may provide the stimulus, care must be taken to ensure that gains made are lasting and not temporary.

Meek, Runshe, Young, Embree, and Riner (2015) present a case study documenting how their institution fostered faculty ownership of the assessment process, resulting in greater faculty commitment to and satisfaction with the OA process. The adoption of an e-portfolio assessment strategy for the doctor of nursing (DNP) degree program provided the opportunity for faculty to collaborate on determining the specific student artifacts that would be included. Similarly, faculty were intimately involved in mapping the curriculum, designing scaffolded assessments, scoring student work, and analyzing results to determine action steps. Throughout the project, professional development and dedicated work sessions served to support the faculty as they participated in the process. A key success of the approach reported in the case study is that faculty began to view assessment as a central responsibility rather than an add-on role (Meek, et al., 2015, pp. 16-17).

Wehlberg (2013) proposed that the OA process must be primarily rooted in the pursuit of improvement and that reporting requirements should be secondary. Additionally, she encouraged establishing systems that recognize and reward faculty for their work in assessment, stressing that this work should not be considered institutional service but rather an integral part of their profession. Tagg (2012) also addressed the issue of rewarding faculty, suggesting that if campus leadership desires change, there have to be benefits for those who engage in what the rest of the institution would view as risky behavior. Tagg further stressed that to achieve a cultural shift, large communities of faculty need to work collaboratively toward the desired change (p. 12).

Ferguson (2007) suggested several best practices to engage faculty such as "capitalizing on the familiar, using embedded assessment, initiating substantive discussions, avoiding the accrediting agency argument, and identifying early adopters" (p. 83). He also discussed the role of administrative leadership in fostering a culture of evidence, stressing the need to broadly share the commitment to OA. This notion of a collaborative approach is also reflected by Leimer (2009) in the discussion of how the Office of Institutional Research, Assessment, and Planning (IRAP) at California State University has worked to maintain strategic planning, institutional research, program review, and outcomes assessment as integrated and mutually supportive.

Although the study conducted by Marrs (2009) was exceptionally small (it included only three faculty members), several key issues of concern were identified. One of the faculty members shared that he and many of his colleagues lamented the fact that opportunities to do good work were often undermined because the evidence collected was only reported, and no action was taken. As a result, the lack of an adequate feedback loop served to alienate otherwise engaged faculty. Another voiced concerns that the results of the assessment would be used to target individual faculty members, creating a greater divide amongst the faculty and increased interference from administration. Marrs also found that the majority of faculty that he interviewed felt strongly that if they had more support from administration they would be better able to engage in assessment work. Support was broadly defined as one or more of the following–release time, stipends, and professional development. In his conclusion, Marrs recommended that an institution's assessment focus be primarily internally oriented and that it be closely linked to pedagogy rather than externally focused to demonstrate accountability. This perspective is necessary because when assessment practice is primarily outward facing, there is a

tendency for faculty to feel that assessment is something being done to them, rather than something that integral to their professional practice as educators.

A similar approach to Marrs (2009) was taken by Evans (2010) in her doctoral study. Like Marrs, she interviewed faculty (10 were included in her study). However, her objective was to explore the "attitudes and behaviors of engaged faculty" (p. 8) with the goal of discovering the positive factors "that allow faculty to overcome resistance" (p. 8) to OA work and process engagement. Faculty included in this study were drawn from a variety of teaching-missioned public and private institutions who self-described themselves as committed to OA and who had at least one year of experience with assessment work. Evans (2010) found that faculty who were most positive about OA work were those who "saw improvement as the more important purpose of outcomes assessment work, [and] found personal meaning in their contributions to improving student learning through outcomes assessment work" (p. 207).

Smith (2005) stressed that "assessment in higher education should be viewed as professional development [and] leadership for effective assessment must come from within the departmental ranks as opposed to an administrative mandate from the top" (p. 7). As do many others, Smith also speaks to the problems caused by assessment initiatives that are externally and compliance-focused stating that "assessment activities performed primarily for an external audience do not allow faculty to embrace the value and potential of using assessment for decision-making" (p. 9). Addressing these difficulties requires ongoing and meaningful collaboration between campus leadership and the faculty to foster communication, provide necessary support, and recognize contributions. This approach ultimately leads to greater faculty ownership of the OA process, which in turn fosters faculty engagement.

Hutchings (2011) suggested that the key to engaging the faculty in OA work is to embed assessment in the discipline (or department), rather than to rely exclusively on broad-based general education assessments. In this way, the curriculum and the professional practice of the faculty become strongly linked to the assessment process, leading to "deeper thinking about how and how well students acquire the field's knowledge, practices, values and habits of mind–and how to improve learning in all of [these] areas" (p. 37). Hutchings views creating overt links between groups focused on the scholarship of teaching and learning and those working on advancing assessment as an especially effective strategy, to both engage faculty and promote a culture of evidence.

In his article, Grassian (2013) recounts his journey from assessment resistor to engaged assessment advocate. His experiences capture many of the themes discussed in this literature review. From a place of confusion and lack of understanding, he viewed assessment as a compliance exercise with little connection to his professional practice. However, over time, the power of a well-instituted and faculty-driven process of outcomes assessment to both improve teaching and learning and to satisfy external stakeholders (accreditors) became apparent. Grassian speaks to the importance of focusing less on leveraging the assessment process for accountability and more on using it to guide continuous quality improvement. The use of the feedback loop to ensure data are used to make evidenced-based decisions is a model that satisfies accrediting bodies and tends to foster faculty engagement, especially when the emphasis is placed on professional practice.

Fostering Organizational Change

Fullan (2001) identifies five components critical to leading change within organizations. These are *moral purpose*, *understanding the change*, *relationship building*, *knowledge creation*,

and *coherence making* (p. 4). These components strongly align with prevailing themes evident in the survey of literature concerning faculty engagement with the culture of evidence. The role of institutional support, both in the form of clear vision and provision of resources is highlighted in nearly every instance. Similarly, the need to establish an environment where collaboration among the faculty, and between faculty and administration, is facilitated emerges as another common factor. Finally, while external pressures from accreditors and other agencies may be the primary stimulus for assessment work to begin on a campus, the fostering of a culture of evidence necessitates a valuing of OA work as internally purposeful to the institution especially as a means to improve student learning. Fullan's framework suggests that these factors, when encompassed by enthusiasm, hope and energy, foster broad-based commitment to change and ultimately the attainment of results (pp. 3-11). The reviewed literature reflects this model by suggesting that vision, resources provision, collaboration, and purposefulness may in concert provide the stimulus necessary to promote faculty engagement in OA practice, allowing for a culture of evidence to be established and sustained.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework for this proposed ontological, axiological study is rooted in social constructivism which holds that meaning is derived from in the interaction of experiences and ideas within an individual's reality (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). The study fits the defintion of an ontological study because it seeks to present differeing perspectives as themes developed in the research. In axiological studies, the researcher explicitly addresses the fact that he or she brings bias to the study and examines it as part of the interpretive process (pp. 20-21). In the case of this study, the researcher is simultaneously immersed in the emerging institutional culture with

study participants and therefore must strive to be transparent with regard to the values brought to the study.

The framework for this study reflects the idea that the phenomenon of faculty engagement in OA is driven by both internal and external factors. Internal factors include faculty perceptions of the purpose and value of OA work, while external factors may be linked to the environment created by administration (Bresciani, 2011; Meek, et al., 2015). It is the interplay of these factors, intensified by pressures from external stakeholders in the form of accreditation standards and governmental regulations, that influences the degree of faculty of engagement and the ability to move toward an institutional culture of evidence. Figure 1 presents a proposed assessment culture continuum to illustrate the stages of evolution for a transforming OA culture.

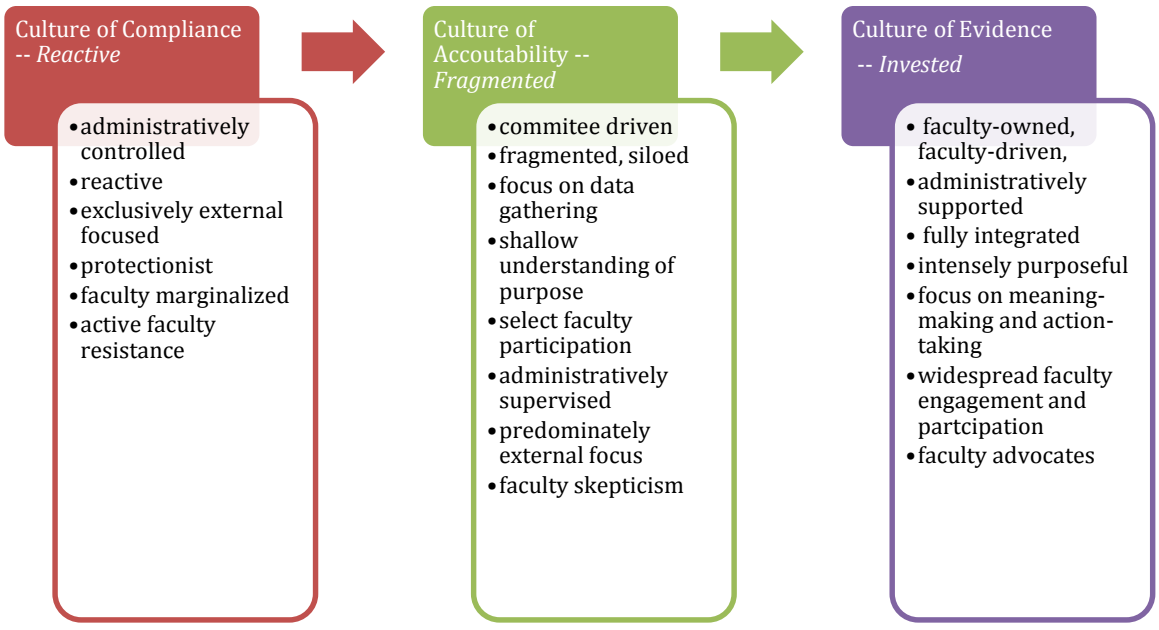

Figure 1: **Assessment culture continuum**

At the lowest level, the culture is described as a *culture of compliance* and marked by OA processes that are administratively controlled, externally focused, and marginalize the faculty (Suskie, 2015, p. 77). In extreme examples, there may even be active resistance to OA (Tagg, 2012, p. 8). In a culture of compliance, significant misunderstanding regarding the role and purpose of assessment activities are present. The midpoint of the continuum, termed a *culture of accountability*, suggests a culture in which OA practice is committee-driven and heavily siloed, (Ferguson, 2007, p. 84). There is shallow understanding of the value and purpose of OA. While substantial emphasis is placed on data gathering by select faculty, little action-taking based on result occurs (Wehlburg, 2013, p. 16).

The *culture of evidence* occupies the highest level of the continuum. Such a culture is marked by an OA process that is faculty-owned and driven, fully integrated within the institutional fabric and intensely purposeful (Ebersole, 2009; Leimer, 2009). Engagement of faculty with OA is pervasive and deeply rooted with a primary focus on leveraging evidence to inform action-taking and fuel continuous improvement efforts (Kuh, et al., 2015, p. 95). The ability of an institution to move across the continuum is contingent upon fostering faculty engagement in the OA process in meaningful and sustainable ways (Emil & Cress, 2014; Evans, 2010; Guetterman & Mitchell, 2015). However, the question that remains to be answered, especially from the faculty voice, is what is necessary to support this engagement and corresponding movement toward of a culture of evidence.

To be effective the OA process must be inclusive and collaborative, engaging faculty and administration in fruitful conversations about meaning and possible action rooted in the evidence gathered (Bresciani, 2011, p. 9). It is also critical that the institution focus primarily on the internal usefulness of the process to refine professional practice rather than on generating ‘proof’

for external audiences. Finally, the need for resources in a variety of forms, including time, support, and education, also appears to be a critical factor (Rogers, et al., 2013, p. 389).

Conclusion

While there is ample case study literature documenting individual approaches to engaging faculty in OA culture, there is limited understanding of the elements at play (Fuller & Skidmore, 2014; Kezar, 2013; Ndoye & Parker, 2010). The model developed by Emil and Cress (2014) provides specific context with regard to intrinsic and extrinsic motivators for faculty engagement in assessment, noting that as OA becomes part of the institution's normative culture, faculty participation rates increase. Unfortunately, operationalizing this process has proved to be challenging for many institutions, especially concerning faculty engagement (Ebersole, 2009, p. 1).

Ultimately, outcomes assessment must be a process that faculty understand and value, otherwise it will be perceived as a waste of time and other institutional resources (Banta & Pike, 2012, p. 55). It is important that faculty do not perceive that assessment is being done to them, but rather that they are stakeholders in a purposeful and intentional process. When the focus is on student success, there is a real opportunity to build consensus with a broad base of faculty. Evans (2010), Leaman (2008) and Marrs (2009) all strongly advocate for additional studies, stressing the need to better understand faculty perspectives regarding OA work and what is necessary to foster a campus culture of evidence. Fuller and Skidmore (2014), Kezar (2013) and Ndoye and Parker (2010) also call for additional research, but stress the need for adopting approaches that are less rooted in documenting individual campus success stories. Rather, they advocate that researchers pursue inquiry that would lead to concrete definitions of assessment culture and models to support faculty engagement. Given the importance of this work to

ensuring that the demands for accountability are answered, the pursuit of such studies would be well-founded (Kuh, et al., 2015, p. 222).

While this phenomenological study was campus-specific, the approach selected had the potential to examine the process of faculty engagement with OA from a new, broader perspective, while simultaneously addressing the identified research gap. Rather than focusing on specific steps implemented in pursuit of change, this study explored the lived experiences of faculty within a transitioning assessment culture. Participant interviews provided important insights on what it is like to be a faculty member engaged in OA as well as the factors that serve to promote engagement. Themes analyzed and extracted from interview transcripts reflect the essence of the faculty experience and illuminate what is necessary within institutional OA practices to speak directly to the faculty perspective. Additionally, the understandings revealed may be useful for guiding future studies, such as a grounded theory approach, and/or provide guidance for institutions intent on transitioning institutional assessment culture.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

This phenomenological study sought to gain insight on faculty experiences within an institution of higher education actively working toward transition of its outcomes assessment (OA) practices and process. OA is the process through which institutions seek to determine the extent to which students have gained the intended knowledge, skills, and behaviors through a program of study (Grassian, 2013; Leaman, 2008; Maki, 2010). While external stakeholders, namely accrediting bodies, require the gathering of OA data as measures of accountability, the process also has the potential to be internally beneficial to an institution. (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Grassian, 2013; Kuh, et al., 2015; Suskie, 2015). Institutional benefits are best achieved when there is a campus-wide commitment to a collaborative process of continuous improvement guided by data analysis and action-taking (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Hutchings, 2011; Leimer, 2009). When achieved, an institution is often said to have a culture of evidence (Kezar, 2013; Kieke, Moroz, & Gort, 2007).

This study queried whether certain institutional characteristics and/or behavior traits foster faculty engagement and the establishment of a culture of evidence, including institutional vision and perceived purposefulness of OA practice, collaboration and a sense of ownership, and access to and availability of resources. Additionally, the study sought to discover if faculty perceived any factors as barriers to engagement. By giving voice to the lived experiences of faculty members as they interact with evolving assessment culture, this study aimed to provide insight and understanding of what it is like to embrace a culture of evidence. The engagement of faculty has been identified as central element necessary to foster a culture of evidence (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Hutchings, 2011; Kuh, et al., 2015; Leimer, 2009; Suskie, 2015). However, for

many institutions, varying levels of faculty engagement with (and in some cases resistance to) OA practice and process have proven to be a significant obstacle to realizing institutional benefits and achieving a desired transformation of institutional assessment culture (Banta & Blaich, 2010; Kramer, 2009; Tagg, 2012).

Setting

The study was conducted at a single academic institution that is in the midst of a multi-year planned initiative to transform assessment culture. The not-for-profit institution of higher education is accredited by the New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC) and grants Associate, Bachelor, Master, and Doctoral degrees. Faculty are non-tenured and are not unionized. While many hold terminal degrees in discipline, others hold professional credentials and bring substantial industry experience to the classroom. This faculty make-up is consistent with and supports the institution's teaching-centered mission.

Over the past two years, significant efforts have been made to foster an environment in which OA is embraced as part of the natural rhythm of work for faculty, rather than as an added-on requirement. Begun in the fall of 2013, the OA culture change initiative has focused on incremental movement through defined and themed stages: Year One, Stabilization; Year Two, Foundations; Year Three, Early Implementation, and Year Four, Full Implementation. The Stabilization year focused on instituting university-wide OA practices to ensure alignment and shared language concerning assessment. During year two, Foundations, program outcomes were revised to ensure measurability and curriculum matrices were developed to illustrate how student achievement is scaffolded across a program of study. Additionally, faculty engaged in a formal process to collaboratively determine assessment strategies for a single outcome per program to be piloted during the next stage of the initiative. The institution is currently engaged in the Early

Implementation stage which calls for the piloting of the assessment strategies developed during year two and the development of strategies for assessing additional program outcomes that will be piloted in the final year of the plan. As a result, situating this study at this time, within this specific institution, provides a unique opportunity to explore faculty perspectives as they are intimately involved in and influenced by institutional efforts to move toward a culture of evidence.

The researcher is the Director of Outcomes Assessment at the institution in question and formerly served there as a full-time faculty member for two decades. While the researcher is responsible for overseeing implementation of the OA plan, there are no direct reporting lines. Deans and department chairs are accountable for ensuring that OA initiatives are fully implemented within their respective units. The Director of Outcomes Assessment functions largely in a supportive role and has an especially good rapport with faculty.

Participants/Sample

Permission to access faculty participants was requested through an application to the Research Approval Committee at the study site. The committee is comprised of representatives from Academic Affairs, the Office of the Legal Counsel, and the Office of Institutional Research. The application required that the project be described in detail, including disclosure of the data gathering strategies, target population, rationale for use of the institution's constituencies, any incentives involved, how results would be used, and with whom results will be shared. Following review by the committee, the researcher was granted permission to conduct the study.

In accordance with the approved study proposal, participants were solicited from full-time, undergraduate faculty at the same physical campus where the researcher's office is located. This population was selected because it has experienced first-hand the ongoing efforts to move

the institution toward a culture of evidence. In addition to being logistically convenient, the campus selected is also the largest, offering a full breadth of academic programs. In designing the study, the need to include faculty from diverse academic units was deemed important in order to provide voice for any nuanced differences bound to pedagogical norms within a particular discipline.

The study design called for two groups to be excluded from participation. The first group included current members of the University Outcomes Assessment Committee (UOAC) who were excluded from the sample in an effort to focus the study on the experiences of the average faculty member. Additionally, faculty teaching in the general education core were excluded from the study because of a desire to restrict the sample to in-discipline faculty.

Invitations to participate in the study (Appendix A) were sent to faculty members from the researcher's institutional email account. The invitation email provided an overview of the study's purpose and the population being targeted (self-identified engaged faculty), the methodology to be used, and expected time commitment involved. Additionally, faculty were informed that participants in the study would not be compensated nor would participants receive any incentive in return for their involvement.

A total of 22 interested faculty responded by email within one week of the recruitment email. Each response was reviewed to ensure the faculty member was not a member of one of the excluded populations. The remaining responses were then sorted into groups according to academic discipline. In cases where more than two faculty members from an academic unit responded, final participant selection was determined by a random drawing.

The selected participants were advised by email of their eligibility for the study. Additionally, a copy of the Consent for Participation in Research form for the study

accompanied each email (Appendix B). The Consent for Participation in Research form provided an explanation of the study, expectations for participant involvement, full disclosure of potential risks and benefits (including privacy protections), and research participant rights. Each was asked to review the form and following the review, to respond by email indicating whether they wished to participate in the study. All responded affirmatively following the review of the consent form document and an interview was subsequently scheduled with each individual.

The final study population consisted of seven faculty members drawn from the following academic units: one from Engineering & Design and two each from Culinary Arts, Business, and Hospitality. The gender mix of the group was balanced with four males and three females participating. Diversity was evident in the area of institutional longevity, with three participants employed by the institution for less than 5 years, one participant employed for between 11 and 15 years, and the three remaining employed at the institution for 11 to 15 years. Only one participant holds a terminal degree; however, two others are current doctoral students. Master's-level degrees held by participants include Master of Arts in Teaching (M.A.T.), Master of Business Administration (M.B.A.), and Master of Science (M.S.). The age of the group was quite homogenous. One participant self-identified in the age range of 31 to 40 years of age, five reported being between the ages of 41 to 50 years of age, and one participant selected an age range of 51 to 60.

Participants Rights

Participant rights were protected in several ways. First of all, participation in the study was voluntary and participants had the right to opt out at any time. This was fully explained in the Consent for Participation in Research form which included information about confidentiality and the voluntary nature of the study. Each participant received a copy of this form by email when he/she confirmed the desire to participate in the study. Additionally, at the time of the

interview, each participant signed two copies of the consent form. One copy was given to the participant, while the other was retained by the researcher. Participants were also asked to select a pseudonym during the interview process. This pseudonym was used exclusively throughout analysis and reporting. Lastly, while demographic information such as academic rank, institutional longevity, and academic discipline was collected in the course of the study, the sole use of this information was generating an aggregate description of the population included in the study. Special care was taken to segregate all demographic data from interview files and participant pseudonyms.

Data Collection

Data was collected over a four-week period using the semi-structured interview process detailed in the Interview Protocol (Appendix C). This approach was selected because it balances the use of scripted interview questions to be answered by all participants with the flexibility of adapting wording and inclusion of additional non-scripted questions as needed (Merriam, 2009). Additionally, the interview protocol was in part adapted from the Survey of Assessment Culture developed by Matthew Fuller, Ph.D. at Sam Houston University (2011). The Survey of Assessment Culture seeks to gain insight into faculty member perceptions regarding the state of campus assessment culture at participating institutions as well as the role of administration, resource provision, and their own personal role in assessment practice. Permission to use the most recent verison of the survey for this purpose was granted by Dr. Fuller (personal communication, November 3, 2015).

Each interview took place in the consultation room at the on-campus faculty center. This location was selected for faculty member convenience and because it ensured a neutral location, being neither the researcher's nor the faculty member's office. A one-hour time period was

scheduled for each interview. However, there was some variability in actual duration. While the average interview duration was calculated at 54 minutes, the longest interview lasted 86 minutes and the shortest interview was 28 minutes.

After signing the consent form and agreeing to the recording of the interview, faculty were asked to describe perceptions of the institutional assessment culture and personal lived experience with OA. In addition, participants were asked to consider how their current perceptions differed from perceptions held in the past and to what they attributed this change. Finally, faculty were asked to discuss both positive and negative aspects of OA work and to consider how widely these views are shared by colleagues. This approach supported the primary goal of this study which was to capture insights from the faculty perspective.

In addition to recording, the researcher took notes during the interview in an effort to capture additional context such as body language. Interview recordings were transcribed using Rev.com, a professional transcription service. Once completed, the transcripts were reviewed by the researcher before being shared with the participants as part of the member check process. Merriam (2009) defines member checks as a strategy to support the internal validity of a study (p. 217). Multiple member checks were conducted throughout data collection and analysis to verify the accuracy. During all of the member checks, participants were encouraged to suggest changes, make additions, and/or request exclusion from the findings as needed to better represent their lived experience.

Researcher Bias

The identity of the researcher and institution selected introduce a significant risk of bias to this study. However, this risk is balanced by the unique condition of the institution's assessment culture which is in flux, as it provides an exceptional opportunity to gain insight into

faculty perceptions in the midst of transition. Additionally, the fact that the researcher is intimately familiar with the OA change initiative and general institutional history ensured fluency with the various campus cultures. These attributes had the benefit of putting participants at ease throughout the various stages of the study.

In an effort to protect against this risk of bias, several significant and deliberate steps were taken to mitigate researcher bias. Throughout the entire study, the researcher maintained a reflexive journal to track incidents of how personal biases may have affected various aspects of the study. The journal served to document instances where researcher conduct, verbal or non-verbal communication, and/or decision making may have introduced bias into the study and served as an important tool to document any instances that may have adversely affected inquiry (Roller, 2012). Additionally, the interview protocol and script were reviewed by an informed colleague for the purpose of identifying leading or potentially confusing questions. All recommendations stemming from the review were fully implemented. Triangulation was used as part of the analysis process as another strategy to reduce bias. Peer debriefing was employed as a final strategy to reduce bias. The individual engaged to serve in this role is internal to the site, but was not eligible to participate in the study, and reviewed methodology, interview transcripts, and the corresponding analysis at regular intervals throughout the data collection and analysis phases.

Analysis

The use of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was determined to be especially well-suited for this study and guided the analysis process. IPA focuses on understanding the meaning of the participants' reported experiences as a result of the researcher engaging in an interpretative relationship with the data (Smith & Osborn, 2007, p. 66). As a

study approach, IPA is generally comprised of three interconnected elements. The first element takes the form of detailed accountings of participant experiences. From these rich narratives, a depiction of the phenomenon emerges from the data. Next, experiences are placed within context and patterns are extracted through the researcher's interpretation of participant accounts. Lastly, the first two elements are analyzed and woven together in themes that provide insight into the meaning of the studied lived experiences (Larkin, Watts, & Clifton, 2006).

Under the IPA approach, the initial examination is intended to ensure familiarity with the participant's account. This is followed by additional reviews aimed at identifying *meaning units*, each of which is framed by research notes and comments. Meaning units are then examined to identify contextual themes and then connected across the transcripts as a strategy of triangulation. Themes are not only selected based on frequency but also based on the ability to provide detail and dimensionality of the phenomenon being studied. This process of selecting themes for inclusion is in part what sets IPA apart from other qualitative research methods (Smith & Osborn, 2007).

The analysis process used in the study began while participants reviewed their individual transcripts for accuracy. While the initial participant review occurred, the researcher read each transcript twice. During the first reading, the researcher simultaneously listened to each of the interview recording multiple times and made notes regarding inflection, pauses, emotions, and all possible incidents where bias may have been introduced. These notes were then correlated with entries in the researcher's reflexive journal and notes taken during the actual interview. The second reading focused on guiding the development of an initial list of codes to be used during the next stage of analysis.

Once the reviewed transcripts were returned by participants, the researcher read each for the third time after making the requested corrections. At this point, the researcher considered the transcripts to be finalized and read each document a fourth time for the purpose of constructing a synopsis of each faculty lived experience. These synopses were sent to participants for validation and were read by the peer debriefer. Additionally, the researcher refined the emerging list of codes and then mapped the codes to interview questions, the themes of the Assessment Culture Survey (Fuller & Beck, 2015), and finally to the study's research questions. As a further effort to reduce bias, two individuals external to the study reviewed the initial codes and suggested revisions.

Next, the corrected transcripts and initial codes were entered into QDA Miner, a qualitative data analysis software program developed by Provalis Research. During the coding process, each interview was read again inside the analysis program, marking the fifth time each was read by the researcher. When coding was concluded, an analysis report was run and all unused codes were deleted. The remaining codes were evaluated, remapped to the research questions, and compared to the conceptual framework of the study, before being further refined by merging. The final coding scheme was then applied in QDA Miner.

During the next stage of analysis, the initial meaning units identified by the researcher were compared to reports extracted from QDA Miner. Each meaning unit was evaluated to determine how strongly it was supported by study data. In cases where limited support was evident, the researcher considered whether or not inclusion of the meaning unit served to illustrate unique aspects of the phenomenon. The resulting set of meaning units was then reviewed by the study's peer debriefer and additional revisions were made to reduce instances of possible bias. Meaning units and corresponding insights gained from QDA Miner analysis were

then grouped under the relevant research sub-questions and reviewed. This review focused on determining connections between identified meaning units for the purpose of discerning essential themes. The process of theme extraction is a central element of IPA and to the generation of study findings. As an additional safeguard against bias, the researcher-identified themes were reviewed by the peer debriefer before being finalized and presented as study findings.

Potential Limitations

One limitation of the study was the use of a convenience sample drawn from faculty at a single academic institution. There are also limitations inherent in the selection of IPA as the methodology for the study. While it is assumed that the researcher correctly interpreted the meaning units and themes intended by participants, it is also possible that some interpretations made were incorrect, resulting in distorted findings.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study sought to understand the lived experiences of full-time faculty within an institution of higher education that is actively seeking to transform OA practice. Through convenience sampling, participants were selected based on a self-identified characteristic of being engaged with OA or having embraced OA practice and teaching discipline. Data was gathered through a semi-structured interview with each participant. Portions of questions included in the interview script were adapted from a national survey. IPA methodology was used to analyze interview transcripts to determine themes that are illustrative of the faculty perspective. The resulting narrative, presented in Chapter 4, was constructed to provide a voice to the faculty experience and insight into what leads faculty to embrace a culture of evidence.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS/ OUTCOMES

This study was conducted by interviewing fulltime faculty who self-identified as feeling more engaged in Outcomes Assessment (OA) than in the past in order to learn about their lived experiences within a transitioning assessment culture. The participants were recruited from a single academic institution that is at the midpoint of a multi-year initiative intended to foster a campus wide culture of evidence. The unique conditions present at the study site provided an uncommon opportunity to hear from the faculty voice what the experience has been like both personally and professionally.

Data were collected over a four-week period and documented through recorded interviews which were professionally transcribed. Transcripts and narrative synopses were reviewed by participants for accuracy. Additionally, study participants were encouraged to submit changes or additions they felt necessary to fully reflect their lived experiences as faculty engaged in OA. The researcher read and listened to each finalized transcript several times before the coding process was completed. Coding of transcripts was completed using QDA Miner, a qualitative data analysis software program. Finally, the researcher employed Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as the methodology for data analysis.

Chapter 4 of this study has been organized in accordance with the model advocated by Larkin, Watts, and Clifton (2006). The first section presents a detailed narrative which gives voice to the experiences of each participant. This is followed by a discussion of meaning-units extracted from the narratives, framed by the research questions used in the study. Finally, building upon the previous two sections, emergent themes are presented giving voice to the phenomenon of faculty experience within a transitioning assessment culture.

Giving Voice to the Faculty Lived Experience

Names used to identify each of the following lived experience accounts represent the pseudonyms selected by participants at the time of each interview. The narratives in the following section were authored by the researcher from interview transcripts as well as notes taken during the interview and while listening to the session recordings. Once constructed, each narrative synopsis was reviewed by the corresponding study participant. All requested changes were incorporated before each account was finalized for inclusion in the study. The resulting narratives provide a rich, multi-dimensional account of the lived experiences of faculty members within a transitioning assessment culture.

Mark

Mark's connection to OA has been strongly informed by his longevity at the institution and leadership role on university committees. From the onset of the interview, he articulated his belief that the primary purpose of OA is accountability for both the institution and the faculty. While he believed strongly that faculty needed to have autonomy in the classroom, he also saw a responsibility to ensure consistency and delivery of the planned curriculum. OA is an important tool for achieving this, according to Mark, as the qualitative and quantitative data collected through the OA process to reveal where inconsistencies exist, allowing them to be addressed, as well as provide insight into "what we are doing well" (Mark, personal communication, January 11, 2016). Mark also saw a strong link between OA, curriculum, students, and industry expectations. Specifically, he discussed the idea that certifications matter to industry and that if the institution's OA data were able to show that students were attaining knowledge, skills, and behaviors aligned with certification requirements this would give industry confidence in academic program quality.

Mark also spoke about how OA integrated with his professional practice as an educator. He was quite candid about his feelings that the current classroom evaluation tool (completed by students each term) is little more than a popularity survey. However, he felt that the information yielded by the OA process provided him with important insight into how well his students are learning, increasing his confidence as an educator.

Mark clearly viewed OA work as valuable and significant. While he did talk about using OA results as outward facing, he spent more time talking about the ways in which the process can inform curricular improvement by the faculty. He has not had long-term involvement in OA committee work, but has been enjoying the work he has been involved in and "is now much more aware of the hows and whys" (Mark, personal communication, January 11, 2016). He spoke about being assigned to a special project committee for outcomes and that "…this forced me to get my feet wet" (Mark, personal communication, January 11, 2016). However, now that he has become actively involved, he is freely choosing to deepen his involvement, as he finds the work rewarding and enjoys working collaboratively with his peers.

When asked about who is responsible for OA at the institution, Mark's perception was that OA is overseen by academic administration but driven by faculty. He expressed awareness that OA is now a priority of the university. He attributed this prioritization to pressures from accrediting bodies and the federal government and acknowledged that all institutions of higher education are dealing with the same issues. Mark identified parent and student concerns about earning an adequate return on their investment as another contributing factor. However, beyond the accountability issue, Mark shared excitement about this work and its potential to drive important change for the institution. He expressed a sense that OA is meaningful work to him and many of his colleagues. A contributing factor to this sense was what Mark described as the

full support of administration evidenced by the substantial resources (active support provided by academic administration, Taskstream, in-services, investment of committee leadership, etc.) devoted to the ongoing initiative. He did stress that quality work takes time and academic administration needs to understand that support and resources are needed for the long haul to ensure continued progress and engagement.

When asked to describe the OA culture at the institution, Mark used words like familiar, focused, important, and meaningful. He went on to say that while there was always some awareness that assessment work was in place at the institution, it was something that could be ignored by the majority of faculty. Mark sensed that this response was no longer the case as more and more faculty are being drawn into the special project committees, are finding that they are responsible for data collection in courses that they teach, or are being required to participate in developing their department's annual assessment plan. As a result, OA has become more integrated into the average faculty member's professional life, and Mark sees this outcome as positive for faculty and students and healthy for the institution as a whole.

Timothy

Timothy is a department-level representative to his academic unit's OA committee. As a result, he has particular insight into the ongoing efforts to transform the institution's OA process as he has been involved as both a faculty member as well as committee representative responsible for supporting his department. At the beginning of the interview, Timothy articulated his view that OA was some of the most important work being done at the institution and spoke extensively about the connection of OA, curriculum, accountability, and industry expectations. He valued OA for its ability to serve as stimulus toward continuous improvement, especially as a driver for refining the curriculum and ensuring that academic programs remain

relevant. Additionally, he shared several examples illustrating how assessment practices (OA and course-level assessment) have served to inform his professional practice as an educator.

Timothy serves on a special project committee that has been working on elements of the university's four-year OA plan. He described his fellow project committee members as "all being engaged and invested in the work" (Timothy, personal communication, January 11, 2016). When asked if he had been given a choice about whether or not be involved in the project committee work, he stated that he chose to remain involved because he finds the work is interesting and meaningful. Collaboration, purposeful involvement, ease of access, clarity, and personal ownership were words that he used frequently when discussing his involvement with OA.

However, while Timothy spoke favorably about the system wide OA initiative, he also noted the work was not without challenges. He explained that the effort to ensure more people get involved has created some obstacles because people are drawn in who are not invested and do not want be involved. Yet, he did note that he has seen this changing and really believes that as more results (from the OA process) are shared, meaningful engagement will spread.

Timothy described the OA process as owned by faculty, which he strongly agreed with. He also talked about the importance of having a champion to lead the work at all levels. He attributed what he called an *increase in engagement* to the fact that the OA initiative has been driven "from the trenches and not done to the faculty from above" (Timothy, personal communication, January 11, 2016). He also talked about the importance of having the right tools to do the work, citing in-services, Taskstream, resources, and training as being particularly helpful. The ease of reporting data as well as access to results on a timely basis were also cited by Timothy as important factors in moving the OA initiative forward. He sees Taskstream as

one of the best investments the university has made, noting that it not only documents the process but also serves as "a platform for faculty collaboration" (Timothy, personal communication, January 11, 2016). When asked to discuss any negative aspects about his involvement in OA, he was quick to say there were none, but then mentioned that it does take time, like many other committees.

Timothy ended his interview by describing the OA culture as becoming stronger, more robust, and improving. He felt good about the work that has been done and the direction the institution is moving in, overall. However, he also shared his belief that senior administration should have a greater sense of urgency about the work, ensuring it is well communicated internally and externally. He feels that the institution has a great story to tell that all faculty should appreciate, and that accreditors, industry, parents and students would want to hear.

Jasmine

Jasmine served as a member of the University Outcomes Assessment Committee (UOAC) several years ago before the work under the current OA initiative began. She was very candid about the fact that during her time on the committee she found the work very confusing. Today, she has a much better understanding due to a more organized approach to the OA work, better support, and the resources provided by the university. She describes her department's OA work as team-based and collaborative. Additionally, she credited her department's faculty representative to UOAC for providing exceptional leadership in guiding the department's OA efforts and simplifying directives from academic administration.

Jasmine spoke about how critical establishing clear and unbiased expectations was for her program, because without standards being set, there could be a perception that work is being evaluated subjectively based on personal taste. She stressed that her field is not like math where

there is a right and a wrong answer, so having clear criteria for assessment is critical. She sees OA work as central to every faculty member's job responsibilities and values the insights that data provide to refine teaching and curriculum. Beyond these factors, Jasmine discussed the idea that OA process provides important insight into curriculum effectiveness. During the interview, Jasmine shared that her previous experience in education was from the K-12 world, so worrying about standards and outcomes is familiar to her.

Jasmine perceived the stimulus for institutional OA work as being multi-faceted, driven by both internal and external forces. While she appreciated that accreditation is a major driver, she also sees the university's focus on OA as being driven by other factors such as institutional pursuit of continuous improvement and a desire to ensure students are learning. When asked about other faculty members' perceptions, she thinks that many faculty members believe the institution's only motive in pursuing OA is to comply with accreditation. Her feeling was that many faculty are simply overwhelmed at the idea of having something else to do and simply do not like change. However, she expects that as more and more faculty become involved, this perception will change especially as the OA initiative reaches maturity and expands "because people will have to participate" (Jasmine, personal communication, January 19, 2016).

Jasmine described the OA process as being faculty-owned. However, she stressed that the support provided by academic administration in the form of guidance and resources was critical to making faculty ownership possible. She also described OA work as interesting, citing the opportunity to work with other faculty as especially rewarding, because conversations about OA often led to deep conversations around pedagogy. Jasmine felt that these conversations have tremendous potential to drive improvement and transform institutional culture. Overall, she characterized her experience with OA as positive. Furthermore, Jasmine tied her engagement

with the work to her responsibility to ensure that students leave her academic programs prepared for their futures.

Charles

Charles felt that involvement with OA gave him purpose because "it connects everything," allowing him and other faculty to "see what the expectations of the university are and how those expectations connect to the students" (Charles, personal communication, January 21, 2016). He described his involvement with assessment as integral to his classroom teaching, and stressed that it helped him to be better, which in turn helped students to learn. Charles explained that he has incorporated OA work into his annual goals as a faculty member at the encouragement of his Department Chair and feels that this inclusion provides him with an additional incentive to become actively involved with OA. In our meeting, Charles used words like interesting, purposeful, meaningful, and important to describe his perceptions about OA and the on-going change initiative.

During the interview, Charles explained that his personal engagement with OA has changed significantly in recent years. He expressed that in the past he knew that there was "some sort of goal" that he should be teaching toward, but that he was not sure what the goal was (Charles, personal communication, January 21, 2016). Today, he said that things are much clearer because of the new OA process and the ongoing change initiative. He attributed his evolution to yearly in-services and specific training sessions. In particular, he discussed one of the early in-services which focused on his program's curriculum matrix. He characterized the in-service as a huge "aha" moment as he gained greater personal understanding that the courses he teaches are part of a larger picture and "not islands unto themselves" (Charles, personal communication, January 21, 2016). Furthermore, he stressed that the conversations that faculty

had around the matrix were revealing, and that the dialog gave everyone a better sense of what was taught where and what they were responsible for in the classes they taught. He identified students as the major beneficiaries of conversations like the ones described above, because the end result is a stronger academic program and higher performance expectations.

Charles was candid about his feeling that in his department there is still some resistance to the institution's OA initiatives. While some feel that OA is just another fad that will soon go away, others are suspicious that OA is someone's pet project and has no real benefit to institution. However, Charles shared that he actively works to combat these perceptions through engaging his peers in conversations about OA. He feels that on the whole the conversations have been really interesting for all involved. He also shared his sense that there is some fear on the part of faculty members but he thinks this fear is going away as the OA plan has unfolded and faculty have gained greater understanding of just what is involved and how the initiative will touch their professional practice.

Charles viewed OA as a student centered process, stressing the fact that "ultimately, that's why we are here" (Charles, personal communication, January 21, 2016). He was quick to acknowledge that OA does involve more work for faculty, and there is often too much to do, which tends to generate additional faculty stress. However, he also discussed how valuable the process has been for him personally and so the work is priority for him. Consistent with several other study participants, Charles also discussed the importance of meeting industry expectations for student learning as an important facet of OA.

When it comes to ownership of OA, Charles expressed his opinion that it is shared equally between faculty, administration, college leadership, and the various OA committees. However, it was clear to him that the stimulus for the OA is coming from Academic

Administration, and according to Charles, that continues to make people pay attention. For him, ownership is linked directly to accountability. As a result, all stakeholders are accountable. In support of this idea, he noted that faculty have autonomy in developing their lessons plans, but in the end they are also responsible for ensuring that the intended outcomes are met, driving accountability. Charles saw ownership and accountability as foundational to furthering an institutional culture that values OA.

Lizzy

Lizzy's involvement in OA has been within her department and as a member of a special project team; however she does not serve on her academic unit's OA committee. Throughout her interview she stressed the need for academic programs to be accountable for education they deliver and stressed that preparing students for industry should be a top priority. She also expressed a sense that students are becoming more discriminating consumers of education and that they too are asking academic programs "what am I learning, and why am I learning it?" (Lizzy, personal communication, February 3, 2016). Lizzy felt that the OA process and assessment practice in general have tremendous potential to answer these questions and related concerns.

Lizzy attributed her increased engagement in OA to her "genuine interest in the world of higher education" and a sense that "faculty as a whole are being more closely scrutinized as questions about the value of a college degree abound" (Lizzy, personal communication February 3, 2016). She viewed OA as critical to maintaining academic integrity, institutional accreditation, and job security, because without accreditation, the university will be "out of business" (Lizzy, personal communication February 3, 2016). She is highly invested in seeing the university thrive and sees OA as a key to that thriving and to protecting what she called "the brand." Additionally,

assessment activities play a central role in Lizzy's professional practice as an educator. As one example, she shared that she challenges students to do self-assessments in hopes that they will become more aware of their personal growth.

When asked to describe her experiences with OA at the institution, Lizzy expressed a feeling that OA work in her department is collaborative and meaningful. She viewed the process as faculty driven but administratively supported. This is because although academic administration provided direction, ultimately most of the work fell to faculty. However, Lizzy was in support of this, because she believes that faculty should have ownership of OA. She did share that she is aware that some faculty are struggling with the change and see OA as too much additional work. She also shared that some feel that the process does not benefit them personally, because they never see the end result. Lizzy challenged this point of view stressing that faculty have the responsibility to pursue continuous improvement at all levels and OA supports this. Despite these challenges, Lizzy felt most faculty have a much better understanding of OA and "are starting to get it" now (Lizzy, personal communication, February 3, 2016). This, she said, has led to great conversations and collaborations that would never have occurred under the previous OA process. She shared that the opportunity to "dive deeply" into the work with colleagues has been incredibly valuable and rewarding for her.

David

During his interview, David shared quite a bit about his personal journey as an educator. He recounted that in his early years as a new faculty member he would often worry that students were leaving his class not knowing everything that they should. However, as he gained experience teaching and especially as he began his involvement with OA, he came to understand that each course was part of a larger continuum. As a result, he came to appreciate that his

primary responsibility in teaching any class was to lay the foundation for the next course, as this would ultimately support student achievement of the program outcomes. David also spoke quite a bit about the power of OA to drive curricular change and help the university continue to improve rather than staying static. Staying static was something he characterized as risky to the institution because ultimately it meant that students may not be prepared for the demands of their future careers.

David attributed the increased structure and organization of the institution's new OA process as a key element driving change, explaining that there is now much more clarity about what is expected and how OA data will be used. Outside accreditation has a significant role in driving OA, but according to David, "it simply pushes us toward doing what we should be doing anyway" (David, personal communication, February 3, 2016). Interestingly, David also shared the idea that humility is an important part of the OA process, because to really engage in the work "you have to be willing to admit that you don't know everything and that there is something new to consider" (David, personal communication, February 3, 2016).

Assessment work has found its way into David's classroom as well. He talked extensively about using classroom assessment techniques to support student learning and to inform revisions of his lessons. He sees grades as less valuable than assessments and wishes that students would not "live and die by grades so much" (David, personal communication, February 3, 2016). David felt that OA provides actionable data about student strengths and weaknesses that grades alone cannot and that more institutions should pursue establishing campus cultures that make OA a top priority.

David described the institution's assessment culture as evolving and innovative. He believes that it is an exciting time for the institution as it is "uniquely positioned to make some

significant contributions in the field of education" (David, personal communication, February 3, 2016). While he believes the institution has always been a leader in the field of education, OA will provide the evidence to really tell its story, and David sees this as a potential competitive advantage. When asked about ownership of the OA process, he expressed his feeling that OA is now owned by faculty, which he feels is appropriate. While he feels invested in the OA work, he shared that not all faculty do. This, he felt, is in part due to the fact that most are content experts first and educators second. However, he identified department leadership as important to addressing these issues. His feeling is that leadership has the responsibility to help those who are not fully engaging with OA to do so. As part of the discussion, he used the analogy of a Jedi mind trick–explaining that administration needs to set everything in place, but then has to give faculty the flexibility to figure it (OA) out and solve the problem on their own. David attributed the fact that academic administration has used this approach as the reason that faculty, like him, have chosen to engage. In describing his own experience with OA, he chose words such as positive, interesting, purposeful, and engaging. Throughout, David expressed a strong sense that the institutional OA culture is changing for the better and he is confident that this will ultimately ensure the university remains strong.

Grace

Grace has been involved with OA initiatives at the institution at a variety of levels over the past several years. In the past, she explained that she had been responsible for gathering OA data in her some of her classes. At the time, she felt frustrated that the work never seemed to come to anything. Her impression was that results were not used and that they were seldom shared with faculty. As a result, the current changes to the OA process and practice have been exciting to her because she believes that work is "so important to be sure that we improve"

(Grace, personal communication, February 4, 2016.) During the interview, Grace touched frequently on the idea that OA is central to ensuring that the institution delivers a quality service to students and to its long-term survival.

Grace provided several examples about how she has worked to ensure that all of the faculty in her department are dialoging about OA at every stage in the process. She explained that she has constantly reinforced the message that they all own the process, so she expects them all to participate. Grace also discussed the role of her departmental OA committee reps on the college committee, stating that their leadership has been invaluable. She sees having an in-department OA leader as so important that she has advocated for cross training to ensure that as committee assignments change there will always be someone prepared to serve as the department's OA champion.

Communication and collaboration came up frequently in Grace's interview. While she did say that some faculty remain resistant, she definitely has seen a difference. For example, she explained that now faculty not only know that OA is important to the university, but she also believes they are starting to see how it benefits them as educators and helps to make the academic programs stronger. According to Grace, faculty now see clear reasons to be active participants in the OA process, and that is something she believed was lacking previously.

Grace identified in-services, the provision of resources, administrative support, and a clearly articulated plan as key elements driving the change in OA culture. For example, she explained that she now hears people asking what she called the right questions–not only what do we do, but what *should* we be doing, which was not always the case. Grace feels that the excitement and power of this change has really begun to draw people in, and faculty do not want

to be left out. Personally, she said that she feels very passionate about OA work and shared that she is excited by the progress the institution has made.

When asked about ownership of the OA process, Grace expressed the belief that the process is owned by faculty and stressed that it has to be this way. Words like exciting, passion, important, interesting, dynamic, and collaboration came up frequently during the interview. OA is work that she is deeply committed to supporting both as an educator and as a unit leader. In concluding her comments, Grace acknowledged that there are multiple demands on faculty time, but she feels that OA work is too important not to be priority for everyone because it ensures that the institution delivers on its promise to students, accreditation, and the community.

Research Questions and Meaning Units

At the outset of the study a central research question (*What is the meaning of lived experiences of full-time faculty members within an institution of higher education working toward establishing a campus-wide culture of evidence?)* was developed as the foundation for the inquiry. To further guide the investigation, six sub-questions, grounded in the study's conceptual framework were authored. During the analysis phase, the researcher drafted meaning units from the transcripts and evaluated them using reports extracted from QDA Miner. In the following section, the meaning units extracted from participant interview narratives have been organized under the corresponding research sub-question.

Culture change

In responding to the study invitation, all participants in the study self-identified as feeling more engaged in OA than in the past. As a result, meanings expressed by faculty about their personal experiences focused on positive feelings about the ongoing change initiative. During the coding process, terms that emerged strongly reflect this overall favorable opinion as can be

seen in the individual codes generated within the category of *culture change*. These included *engaging, exciting, improving, interesting, positive, purposeful,* and *transforming*.

Across all seven accounts, a universal sense that the institutional assessment culture was improving was expressed by all study participants. This was evident through the use of the word *improving* as well as through transcript segments coded as *improving.* Additionally, five of the seven participants characterized the culture as *transforming*. While change can be a source of stress in some instances, it appears that the participants in this study have embraced the on-going change. Evidence of this can be seen through coding frequency analysis which revealed overlapping segments coded as *improving*, *transforming*, and *exciting*. Finally, the four participants who depicted their experience with OA as interesting also expressed a sense of *purposefulness* to involvement, and all but one individual in this second group characterized the work as *engaging*.

Barriers to engagement

Exploration of this sub-question focused on both the personal experiences of participants and their recounting of their perceptions of the experiences of faculty peers. Codes used under the category *obstacles to engagement* included *competing demands, confusion, fear, and skepticism. Competing demands* emerged as the predominant obstacle for all study participants, far exceeding all other codes within the category. All seven participants cited a lack of time and too much to do as negative aspects of engaging in OA. However, analysis of transcripts revealed that in every instance, the discussion of negative aspects was immediately followed by passages coded with one or more of the following–*positive, value, continuous improvement,* and *teaching and learning.* This is an indication that while study participants have experience with barriers to

engaging in OA, they have come to terms with them because of the priority they have personally placed on process.

The remaining codes *confusion, fear,* and *skepticism* were not used by study participants to describe their own current perceptions about OA, however some accounts did contain coded passages that were reflective of past personal experiences in line with these codes, providing evidence of that personal opinions have evolved. Most frequently, passages linked to these three codes emerged when faculty were asked to comment on how widely they believe their personal perspectives on OA are shared within the larger cohort of faculty at the institution. *Confusion* emerged as the most prevalent code, being applied in six of the seven accounts. Examination of coded segments revealed that study participants shared a sense that some of their peers still do not understand the role and purpose of OA at the institution and that this serves as a barrier to engagement. Interestingly, study participants also expressed a sense of personal responsibility to educate and mentor their colleagues on the importance and benefit of OA, noted in statements made describing conversations they initiated with less engaged peers.

Fear emerged as a barrier to engagement in two participant accounts. In both accounts, segments coded as *fear* were detected immediately following segments coded as *confusion*, suggesting a connection between the two factors. The code *skepticism* was applied to passages that suggested meanings such as a suspicion by faculty that the current OA initiative would be short lived, that it was a pet project for someone in administration and/or that it was just busy work with little purpose. As with the code *confusion,* examples of how study participants have worked to address these misconceptions were evident in each of the transcripts where this code was applied. Closer examination of the four accounts that included the code *skepticism* showed all noted that such feelings were the exception, rather than the rule.

Vision and purpose

To explore this area of the inquiry, each participant was asked to reflect on what he or she saw as the primary purpose of institutional assessment efforts. Analysis of all participant accounts showed extraordinary alignment within the coding category of *vision and purpose*. In particular, three of the codes–*continuous improvement, stakeholder accountability*, and *teaching and learning* were strongly linked across all transcripts.

Closer examination revealed a predictable pattern to participant responses. Initially, all began by discussing external pressures for accountability, especially in the form of external stakeholders seeking to guarantee institutional quality. Stakeholder constituencies cited by participants included accrediting bodies, government, parents, students, industry, and professional organizations. However, immediately following this type discussion, all accounts transition to commentary focused on internal usefulness of OA as a driver toward *continuous improvement* and *support of teaching and learning*. Participants shared rich descriptions, detailing personal accounts of how OA had served to guide and refine their professional practice as educators. Additionally, they spoke about the ability of OA to support consistency and quality of the curriculum through collaboration with peers as well as through reviewing assessment data and engaging in evidenced-based decision-making.

The efforts taken by participants to share specific examples of the role of OA in fostering improvement and student learning suggests that while participants were aware of external accountability pressures, they chose to focus OA energies inwardly toward institutional benefit. Additionally, the prevalence of these related codes in all accounts suggests that there may be a connection between vision and purpose and the phenomenon of faculty engagement in OA. This

observation also provides some indication that institutional assessment culture has moved past mere compliance.

Faculty engagement

Participants in the study all self-identified as feeling more engaged in OA than in the past. As a result, meanings expressed by faculty about their personal experiences focused on positive feelings about the ongoing change initiative. Terms that emerged under the coding category of *faculty engagement* included *collaboration, committee work, humility, involvement, ownership, recognition, and value.* Of the codes applied, *collaboration* was the most prevalent, being detected repeatedly in all transcripts. While not as densely represented, passages related to *ownership* were also evident in all accounts. Analysis by QDA Miner revealed that in all cases, excerpts tagged as *collaboration* and *ownership* appeared in close proximity, defined as within four sentences, to each other. This proximity of terms may indicate a relationship between active participation with peers and a sense of process ownership.

Five accounts shared two other codes–*involvement* and *value.* Unlike the two codes discussed previously, analysis did not indicate a direct connection between these two elements. However, in all cases, coding analysis revealed patterns that linked *involvement* to *collaboration* and *value* to *ownership.* For three participants, the code *committee work* highly aligned with the codes of *collaboration, involvement, ownership, recognition, and value.* The remaining code *humility* was reflected in a single transcript. The decision to retain this code as a meaning unit was made in order to provide additional dimensionality to the studied phenomenon.

Support and resources

For analysis purposes, the codes of *communication, in-services, leadership,* and *Tasksteam* were grouped under the category of *support and resources.* All study participants

specifically cited accessibility of resources, in the form of physical, technological, and informational as crucial to moving the initiative forward. Additionally, the role of *leadership* in advancing the OA change initiative was clearly articulated by all participants. All discussed the significant and necessary role of academic administration in providing leadership in the form of expectations, direction, and resource allocation. According to five study participants, the provision of needed resources clearly signaled to the academic community that OA was a top-level priority for academic administration. These same individuals specifically cited as pivotal the institution's investment in Taskstream (a technology platform) to support OA.

Additionally, the importance of *communication,* especially at the department and committee level was discussed by four participants. Segments coded as *in-services* appeared in close proximity to those coded for *communication* as well as *teaching and learning.* Participants who discussed the importance of *communication* as a resource also discussed specific instances where the sharing of information had fostered greater understanding of OA. A common element in each of the cited incidents is that they occurred within group settings, such as a committee or in-service. This may indicate that the sharing of resources is a contributing factor to faculty engagement in OA.

Thematic Findings

The themes presented in the following section were developed from researcher-generated meaning units, study notes, and QDA analysis reports. In concert, these themes serve to illustrate the phenomenon of faculty-lived experience within a transitioning assessment culture. It should be noted that the faculty included in this study self-identified as *more engaged in OA than in the past* at the time they were recruited. This may account for the generally positive tone of study findings.

Professional practice and institutional strength

All participants relayed stories of how their professional practices as educators had benefited from exposure to the ongoing OA initiatives. Specifically, participants identified how their involvement with OA work had provided a stimulus for course improvements and inspired them to revisit their classroom teaching practice. There also appears to be a shared sense that the ongoing OA initiative will help improve student learning.

Participant accounts stressed that OA work that matters to the institution both internally and externally. They viewed the process of culture change as positive, evolving, and gaining strength. For some these interactions helped to validate they were contributing to the institution in meaningful ways and the sense of intrinsic reward was evident. This was another area in which the theme of making a difference came to the surface. There appears to be a shared sense that the ongoing OA initiative will help improve student learning, institutional stature, and industry perceptions.

The following statements are direct quotes from the participants that support their perception that OA supports their professional practice and institutional strength:

- If we're not capturing the data, we don't know. We could stumble upon the next best thing in culinary education, but if we didn't record it, I can't recreate it, just like a recipe. Outcomes assessment allows me the opportunity to capture that data so that I can now develop a recipe for success. It's a good analogy.
- Now you're actually looking at it [OA] and faculty are more engaged in the whole process, and they can see how the classes are starting to come together…

- We can talk about methodology and how you teach and all that, but at the end of the day, are they learning? Are they not learning? Are they learning what we are setting up in the curriculum? OA lets us know…
- From my personal experience as a faculty member I was very focused on essentially pushing content, and was not as concerned, or as focused on how effective I was …but I think I've become much better as a faculty member, as a teacher, as a result of my work on the outcomes process.
- It was very eye opening because I was able to see, I think we were all able to see, what we're doing and how it fits into the scheme of things….where does today, where does Wednesday fit into the whole sum of 4 year degree? I think outcomes allows me certainly to do that.
- Well, it [OA] benefits us [the institution], because it can identify an area that we could be doing better… Who doesn't want to do better?
- I think when you look at it, when you visualize it on a map, and you're deliberately putting linkage into your curriculum, that it is very helpful. Everyone is able to see the big picture, and over time I think that's going to be quite helpful, because up until now, and especially between schools, as any organization you have silos.
- We are adding things [as a result of OA] because we want our students to be better prepared when they leave. The industry is changing, or our industry is changing…You have to stay relevant and current. If you don't do that it's ... It would be bad, it would be bad. It's not even an option, no.

Barriers to OA engagement persist.

Analysis revealed that the study participants have experience with and knowledge of the barriers that inhibit faculty engagement with OA work. However, in the case of participants, the barriers were overcome or seen as surmountable; however that has not been the case with some of their peers. Nearly all gave examples of faculty who were not engaged and suggested reasons why this may be the case. Participant cited factors such as the time pressures, having too much to do, lack of understanding, fear of the unknown, and resistance to change as common barriers. Several study participants cited other faculty as obstacles. Although many are seeing improvement, others have a sense that some faculty will never engage in OA.

The following statements are direct quotes from the participants that support their perception of barrier to engagement with OA:

- This [OA] is different. This is not an easy ongoing task to get everybody on board on, because the people [involved] are going to change.
- I just feel sometimes it's a vibe that most faculty feel burdened by everything they have to do on an average day...I think it's more about, they feel threatened about the unknown, like, 'How am I going to get this done?', or, 'How many steps do I have to take to do this?', or, 'If I used to assess this way', they might feel threatened like, 'Well now they want me to assess that way', and change is hard for everybody.
- I think as an institution, the faculty members need to understand that the assessment process would be something that shouldn't be feared…but there is fear.
- I don't think all faculty get it, but they're aware, so I think awareness is something. They understand. It's like a hot pan. They know it's there. They know when they start talking

about it or engaging, that they need to think about what they're saying and think about what they're doing or they're not ... It's dangerous.

Accountability and continuous improvement

The idea that the institution has a responsibility to ensure quality and consistency came up frequently, as did the idea that OA will provide the data to make this work possible. While faculty participants perceive OA as externally mandated, they also see it as intensely purposeful internally. All faculty discussed the deep sense of satisfaction they experienced from opportunities to engage with their peers about OA, debate curriculum changes and consider their own personal practice.

The following statements are direct quotes from the participants that support their perception that OA supports accountability and continuous improvement:

- Academic integrity, accreditation is being maintained. I think today, every institution, every company really, every brand–and we are a brand–you have to be as transparent and authentic as possible, and I think when you make sure that you are doing good by the student and by the faculty, by the population of the university, by always taking assessment seriously, and that we're not wasting anyone's time or money by coming here, that allows us to be very transparent as a university.
- To say, 'This is what we're doing. We do it on a regular basis. We take it very seriously.' Because not all institutions do that, I don't think. I know they have to, to some degree, but you have a lot of elite institutions that I know for a fact, do not do it as often as they should...
- If we say we want this [a certain level of achievement] at the end of their [a student's] career here, then are we actually doing that? Beyond that, how are we actually doing

that? Not we're working on it, or whatever, some fluffy generic words. It's real. It's measurable. It's articulated. It's pervasive. I think having all of that is helpful to being able to really determine whether or not you are doing your job.

- If we're going to stay viable, colleges and universities in general, this is the direction they're going to have to move in because you can't just be like, 'No, this is what we do, I swear it works'…there need to be evidence that it works…
- To the institution, it's [the result of the OA process] going to be an important measure like retention, like graduation rates. I think of institutions that can't prove this, are going to get themselves into trouble eventually.

Leadership, ownership, and partnership

While guidance from Academic Administration is important, study participants felt that administration cannot drive the process. Faculty ownership is central to any real and lasting culture change. Collaboration and process ownership were cited repeatedly by participants as being central to fostering their engagement in OA. They feel that OA has stopped being "busy work" and now perceive it as high profile work that movers and shakers internally and externally value. As a result, they see getting on board with the changing culture is the smart thing to do.

The following statements are direct quotes from the participants that support their perception about the roles of leadership, ownership, and partnership as drivers of faculty engagement:

- We as educators, administrators. We as an institution. I feel like we're one big community here, but we are siloed, and I'm really hoping that we can continue to break down, but I think the 'we' is not all on the faculty shoulders, it's not on administration's shoulders, I think it is a collective we.

- I think it has to come from a level above faculty, in such a way that they're not feeling threatened by it, they don't feel it's going to be overly time consuming, but they also need to understand that it's linked to their job security. I'm sorry to say that, but it is.
- I think I've always been involved, so one of the factors is the university's initiative to increase their outcomes assessment initiatives. That is something that I am totally on board with. I don't know if it was a real personal switch because I've always felt passionate about it, but I think when the university is moving towards increased focus on outcomes, I'm completely with them on that.
- I guess I'd want to change. I'd want everyone to have as much passion as those that are leading the force.
- We have a very close department so I'm very lucky because right now the members of the department everyone is really excited about what we're doing and engaged.

Support and resources

It is clear that OA is a major focus for the institution because of the resources put behind it and the elevated profile of work on campus. For many participants, the availability of resources facilitated engagement, whether in the form of in-services, and the adoption of Taskstream or in the provision of a clear timetable and direction of what to do. Several participants cited the increased availability of resources as the turning point toward meaningful culture change. While some advocated for even more support to be provided, there was a clear recognition that, when the resources were put behind the OA initiative, institutional leadership was serious about moving forward and had listened to what was needed. The right resources were provided at the right time and that made a real difference.

The following statements are direct quotes from the participants that support their perception about the roles of support and resources in fostering the OA culture change initiative:

- I think it [Taskstream] is very significant. It gives the committees, the faculty that's working on these processes the opportunity and the platform to collaborate, to document that collaboration, to have a standard set of tools, to have standard formats, to have standard requirements that are structurally similar, but have enough flexibility that could meet really any outcomes, observation, or articulation, or assessment, and most importantly allow the individual faculty members–specifically with their teaching in assessment capture courses– the ability to quickly and easily complete that work, and have it in a database where it can be effectively utilized quickly without a lot of manual intervention. I think that's huge.
- Ultimately I think it [Taskstream] is going to be one of the best investments the university has made. The university obviously makes a number of investments, but I think this is going to be critical for a number of reasons, not the least of which is accreditation because it is a capture point for all of the work that's done while the documentation who said what when, who did what when, what were the results of the assessments, and what action was taken as a result of those, and then what. It really is going to give people who look at our program from outside the ability to very clearly see how effective we are at what we're doing. I think it's going to give us an advantage.
- Now, I say that yes, you're forced to do it, but the infrastructure's in place. It's not like you're ever going to be doing it alone.
- Only that I've learned a lot, and I have a completely different perspective on it than when I first started here. Mainly because of the in-services we've had. We had one two years

ago in May, where again, we did this whole thing where we broke down everything, and we really looked it all over. I think we rarely get a chance to be with our colleagues like that, where we're not distracted by everything else we have to cover in our department meetings. When you have an in-service or an off-site, or whatever you want to call it, it lets you check everything else at the door and really focus on that, and I hope we do it again.

OA is personal

Despite the fact that they perceive OA as a component of their professional responsibilities, participants also expressed a deep personal connection to the work. Throughout the accounts, there is a shared sense that OA work is meaningful and faculty used words like purposeful, exciting, and interesting when asked to describe their experiences within the current assessment culture. The majority explained that they had voluntarily deepened their involvement in the on-going initiative because they find the work personally rewarding as well as critical to advancing their individual skills and abilities.

The following statements are direct quotes from the participants that are illustrative of their personal connections to OA and the ongoing culture change initiative:

- I find it very interesting, and it's one of the things where you can devote a significant amount of time to it, and actually learn quite a bit about teaching.
- I mean, we have a rubric but once we get to really lining that up to the outcomes it's a nice feeling for me especially being like a type A to have everything lining up and making sense, it's going to be a nice feeling to have done that, so that's the positive.

- I think has value to me as a faculty member from a performance standpoint, in terms of my own confidence, but also something to think forward if I were to leave this institution and try to go to another institution.
- I think it gives us a purpose. It gives me a purpose. It connects everything.
- I think it's [reason for engagement with OA] just genuine intrigue and interest as the models of higher education are changing,
- …you really have to be humble, because when I first started, like I said, it [my class] was the best class ever. You have to break that down, and be willing to really take a hard look at even your own weaknesses, and identify what are things that I need to work on as well to be a better instructor.
- I'm excited about it [OA work], if I haven't said that. Yeah, I just think it's so important. I'm excited to see the results. I'm excited to learn more.
- It's [the OA process] been great. Like I said, it's been very positive for me because I feel like it's allowed me to become a better teacher.

Conclusion

The preceding narrative was constructed to provide a voice to the faculty experience and insight into what leads faculty to embrace a culture of evidence. The lived experiences of the faculty included in this study are strongly linked to their identities as educators. They believe strongly in the quality of the academic programs they teach in and believe that OA will help make their programs stronger. Opportunities to collaborate with peers and engage in discussions about curriculum and other aspects of pedagogy are enjoyable activities. They appreciate the various forums for these types of activities that have been created through the ongoing OA change initiative. While they feel the pressure of having too much to do, they make OA work a

priority because it is interesting, speaks to their personal passions, and purposeful. They are excited and invested for the long term and do not see OA as something that is a fad. Rather they view it as a normal and necessary part of "doing business" for any serious academic institution. Finally, they experience personal reward from their involvement in OA, expressing a sense of excitement, interest, curiosity, and satisfaction stemming from the work. Chapter 5 presents a detailed discussion of thematic findings, informed by the literature review. Additionally, the chapter presents recommendations for future study and considerations for those seeking to drive assessment culture change within institutions of higher education.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Through a detailed discussion of study findings and relevant literature, this chapter presents insights gained about the meaning of the faculty-lived experience within a transitioning assessment culture. The phenomenon was explored through the first-hand accounts of faculty who self-identified as feeling more engaged in Outcomes Assessment (OA) than in the past. Interview transcripts were coded and analyzed using QDA Miner software. Once coding was completed, the meaning units identified by the researcher were used to generate themes through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). The five study themes that emerged from IPA were then individually considered within the context of existing body of knowledge concerning OA, faculty engagement and assessment culture.

Chapter 5 begins with a discussion of themes and relevant literature. Following this discussion, implications of the study findings are presented, informed by the preceding discussion of study themes. Finally, the chapter concludes with recommendations to guide future actions and research inquiry of the phenomenon of faculty engagement within a transitioning assessment culture.

Interpretation of Findings

Each of themes presented within this section serves to illustrate a specific facet of faculty-lived experiences within a transitioning assessment culture. Considered holistically, these themes provide a rich description of the studied phenomenon. However, when considered individually, they present a unique opportunity to contemplate each theme through the lens of existing of literature and research. The following discussion of study themes is conducted using this approach.

Professional practice and institutional strength

A shared characteristic of faculty included in this study was their overwhelming commitment to their professional practice as educators. This theme was evident not only in the statements that specifically describe their activities in the classroom as teaching professionals, but also through broader commentary connecting OA to teaching and learning, curriculum, and program improvement. This aligns with Emil and Cress (2014) who found that faculty who valued assessment as a tool for refinement of professional practices as educators were more likely to engage with OA initiatives within their institutions (p. 544). Similarly, Grassian's (2013) account of his own process of becoming a faculty member engaged with OA stressed the importance of being able to connect institutional assessment work to teaching and learning (p. 157). As a result, it is not surprising that the participants in this study, who all self-identified as feeling engaged in OA, also shared a deep investment in their professional practice as educators.

The individuals included in this study appeared to view their involvement in OA as a natural outgrowth of their designated role as educators, rather than as an *add-on*. As a result, OA appears to be fully integrated into their professional practice. This is consistent with the definition of an institutional culture of evidence in which assessment practice is integral to the roles and responsibilities of faculty members for the purpose institutional improvement (Kezar, 2013; Kieke, Moroz, & Gort, 2007). Meek, Rushne, Young, & Embree (2015) also attributed faculty engagement with OA to the acceptance of assessment as a key function of the faculty role (pp. 16-17). This evidence of faculty investment in OA is especially significant as Kezar (2013) stressed that this type of support is critical to driving institutional improvement (p. 190). Numerous authors have also identified OA driven institutional improvement efforts as a mark of institutional effectiveness and strength (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Dill, 2014; Fuller, Henderson,

& Bustamante, 2015; Guetterman & Mitchell, 2015; Kuh, et al., 2015; Leimer, 2009; Suskie, 2015). Considered together, the experiences shared by faculty participants in this study indicate that they concur that a robust OA process contributes to institutional strength.

Barriers to OA engagement persist

Participant accounts clearly illustrate that barriers to faculty engagement persist within the institutional culture and environment. All accounts acknowledge that OA is time-consuming and requires substantial effort. However, it is interesting that despite these barriers, all study participants consider themselves engaged in OA. Universally, they have chosen to engage in the institutional OA initiative and are proud of the choice they have made, often citing specific examples of how they have personally contributed to the advancement of the work. Emil and Cress (2014), Gutterman and Mitchell (2015), and Maki (2011) have all proposed that faculty willingness to engage in OA increases when opportunities for meaningful participation abound. The experiences of faculty in this study appear to be illustrative of this relationship.

Perceptions held by other faculty were also considered during the study. It is clear from the accounts shared by participants that pockets of faculty resistance remain, despite the on-going change initiative. However, participants did not seem to view this as an indication of stalled progress, but rather an opportunity. Several recounted how they had sought to engage resistant peers in dialogs about their own experiences with OA why it matters to them personally and to the institution. This reflects "energy-enthusiasm-hopefulness constellation" included in Fullan's (2001) model for leading culture change as an important driver for moving initiatives forward. Additionally, it aligns with Ferguson (2007), Grassian (2013), Hutching (2011), and Zubrow (2012), who all stressed the potential for faculty-to-faculty mentoring to drive further engagement.

Interestingly, many of the barriers to OA engagement commonly noted in the literature were not present in the findings. Many authors have suggested that faculty resistance is driven primarily by concerns about academic freedom, intrusive processes, and the lack of reward structures (Bresciani, 2011; Ebersole, 2009; Emil & Cress, 2014; Kramer, 2009; Tagg, 2012); however, participants in this study tended to attribute lack of engagement to conflicting demands and simply having too much to do, rather than to philosophical differences with OA.

Accountability and continuous improvement

Study participants perceived a dual purpose for institutional OA efforts. Like respondents to the 2015 Survey of Assessment Culture (Fuller & Beck, 2015), participants acknowledged that responding to external mandates, such as accreditation standards, have played a significant role in driving the institutional quest for assessment culture change. However, their lived experiences as engaged faculty members speak to their vision of leveraging this externally mandated process in ways that ensure continuous improvement rather than just answering reporting demands. This was evident in faculty narratives that spoke to the responsibility of delivering a quality product–whether that product is defined as an educational experience or by producing graduates ready to meet the demands of industry. There seems to be a shared sense that OA is most purposeful when used internally to inspire improvement, rather than focused on generating proof for external stakeholders. Wehlberg (2013) advocated internally driven OA orientation as did Smith (2005) who concluded that externally focused OA initiatives tend to disengage faculty from meaningful participation in the process.

Participant accounts also seemed to indicate that they are deeply invested in pursuing continuous improvement as a means of ensuring institutional longevity and institutional reputation. Not only were participants invested in producing a quality product, as discussed

previously, they were also committed to OA as means of raising the stature of the institution and its programs. For many of the participants it appears that, as the reputation and stature of the institution grows, so then, does their own worth because they are integral members of the larger organism.

Leadership, ownership, and partnership

Faculty participants in the study shared a sense that institutional progress toward assessment culture change was linked to what they perceived as a significant shift in the priorities within Academic Administration. Prior to the OA change initiative, several commented that they felt that OA was something that only some faculty were involved in. Now, participants said that they feel administration expects that all faculty will be involved and while this presents some challenges, overall participants view this as a positive development. This mirrors Foster (2007), Gutterman and Mitchell (2015), and Leimer (2009) who all emphasized the critical role of academic leadership in creating campus environments where assessment work will be taken seriously and have the opportunity to flourish.

However, while all participants acknowledge the importance of administrative support, they were also unanimous in the view that the institution's OA process has remained faculty driven and felt strongly that this was appropriate. Participants shared multiple examples of how faculty committee representatives at the committee and department level have successfully led OA, crediting the success, in part, to the fact that while clear expectations were articulated by academic administration, individual units were given some latitude in determining how best to attain the results required. A number of authors have also found a connection between faculty ownership of OA, faculty engagement in campus assessment work, and the fostering of an

institutional culture of evidence (Allen, Noel, Rienzi, & McMillin, 2002; Hutchings, 2011; Kuh, et al., 2015; Maki, 2010; Ndoye & Parker, 2010; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003).

Faculty ownership of curriculum development and delivery was another factor that appeared to promote ownership. Connected to this factor was the perception that OA can also be leveraged as a means of gauging curriculum effectiveness. As owners of program curricula, study participants by extension shared the belief that OA too, must also be owned by the faculty. In light of this, it is not surprising that the faculty included in the study also articulated a strong link between OA and the scholarship of teaching and learning. This connection was also found by Evans (2010), Grassian (2013), and Hutchings (2011) who determined that faculty ownership of OA increased when there was a shared sense that the work was framed within a larger campus commitment to excellence in teaching and learning.

A sense of partnership between faculty and administration and amongst the faculty also emerged from the study accounts. Participants expressed the sense that it was important for them to engage in the on-going OA initiative because it was being done for the right reasons and because faculty have a critical role to play in the process. This aligns with an emerging framework proposed by Fuller which linked faculty investment in assessment initiatives to the conviction that OA is valued and purposeful across the institution (Matthew Fuller, personal communication, November 18, 2015). Partnership in the form of opportunities to collaborate with peers was also cited repeatedly by participants, especially through in-services and involvement with special project teams. While some authors have found that expectations for faculty to be collaborative within assessment work can be a disincentive for some faculty (Evans, 2010; Kramer, 2009; Marrs, 2009; Tagg, 2012), a number of others have found the opposite to be true (Banta & Pike, 2012; Bresciani, 2011; Ebersole, 2009; Kieke, et al., 2007; Kuh, et al., 2015;

Meek, et al., 2015). The findings of this study aligned with the latter, as all participants expressed strong feelings that the opportunity to work closely with their peers on the OA was one of the most beneficial aspects of the institutional initiative and reflected the *relationship building* cited by Fullan (2001) as a key component of leading organizational change (p. 4).

Support and resources

Palomba and Banta (1999, as cited in Evans, 2001) suggested that if OA initiatives are to be successful, academic leadership must address "the three R's of responsibility, resources, and rewards" (pg. 8). Nearly all participant accounts identified the fact that academic administration had substantially invested resources (human, financial, and technological) to support OA as a contributing factor to their own sense of engagement as well as to the institutional progress toward assessment culture change. Faculty participants cited assessment oriented in-services, the phase-gated OA plan, and clarity of expectations as specific examples of resources provided. Banta and Pike (2012), Heron & Dugan (2004) and Suskie (2015) have all identified the availability of such resources as critical to successful OA change initiatives. Finally, several study accounts identified the acquisition of *Taskstream* (a commercially available technology evaluation platform) to manage the OA process as significant turning point as faculty felt they were finally given tools to get the work done. Interestingly, some participants expressed the feeling that this investment signaled that academic administration acknowledged that adequate resources had not previously been provided.

OA is personal

For participants in this study, there was a clear indication that involvement in OA mattered to them on personal level, not just as professional obligation. This was evident through the use of descriptors used by participants when asked to describe what it is like to be a faculty

member who feels engaged in OA which included words such as interesting, purposeful, exciting, and enjoyable. These positive descriptors connect to findings by Emil and Cress (2014) who determined that faculty motivation to participate in OA increases when a sense of personal reward from the work was experienced, as well as with Evans (2010) who found that faculty who expressed positive views about assessment were those who found it personally valuable. As a cohort, the individuals included in this study appear to be deeply invested in pursing improvement of their own teaching and in contributing toward fostering an environment in which the stage is set for excellence in student learning. These are not individuals who are minimally invested because administration said OA was important, rather they are individuals who have embraced OA as central to their identities as educators within higher education.

Implications

In seeking to understand the lived experiences of faculty within a transitioning assessment culture, this study also hoped to address a gap in the existing literature identified by Fuller and Skidmore (2014), Kezar (2013), Ndoye and Parker (2010). All suggested that much of the existing research was overly cased-based and as a result may have limited applicability to guide institutions seeking to foster movement toward a culture of evidence. While this study was also limited to a single institution, the focus of the inquiry was different in that it sought to explore faculty perceptions about changing OA culture rather than to document a particular approach to OA work. By documenting the faculty-lived experiences, insight was provided into the phenomenon of faculty engagement as expressed by the faculty voice. This insight may serve as the foundation for further critical inquiry.

The results of this study appear to indicate that faculty who are highly invested in their professional practice as educators are more open to engaging in assessment work and by

extension are more supportive of institutional level OA initiatives. The faculty included in this study were diverse in discipline, educational background, and teaching philosophy; however, a common narrative emerged linking their engagement in OA to the personal reward they experienced from teaching. Simply expressed, they feel good about the work they are doing and see the value in it, which serves to further deepen their engagement in the ongoing institutional OA efforts. While these faculty members have experience with common barriers to OA engagement such as time, lack of resources, and competing demands, they have been able to overcome these obstacles because they are invested in the process and the pursuit of continuous improvement. As a result, the conclusion can be drawn that OA matters to these faculty members, because teaching matters to them. This finding is supported in the literature by Bresciani (2011), Evans (2010), and Hutchings (2011) who all advocate leveraging the scholarship of teaching and learning as a means of fostering an institutional culture of evidence.

Faculty ownership of OA emerged as another important study theme. Participants were quite vocal regarding their feelings that any assessment initiative had to be owned and driven by the faculty. However, they were also quite clear that leadership from academic administration was also a critical component. A model through which academic administration provides the framework, building materials and the desired timetable, while faculty collaboratively complete the build-out according to local meaning-making emerged from the study accounts. Faculty are willing to invest in the work so long as they maintain ownership of the process, have the necessary resources, and that the end result proves to be beneficial for all involved. The desire for and positive value of collaborative opportunities with peers were discussed by all participants as being central to advancing the institutional change initiative. This reflects Fullan's (2001)

framework for organizational change which cites relationship building, knowledge creation and coherence building as key elements for success (p. 4).

Leaders of academic institutions continue to be challenged by expectations that they will take deliberate action to establish meaningful OA processes on their campuses (Banta & Palomba, 2015; Kuh, et al., 2015; Suskie, 2015). Further complicating the issue is the fact that the stimulus for OA is often external and therefore not owned by the academic institution. However, the participants in this study expressed strong feelings that external accountability can be leveraged to build institutional strength and reputation, especially as a mechanism to inform continuous improvement. This construct aligns with Transformational Leadership theory through efforts to actively investigate new directions and a commitment to action-taking aimed at ensuring greater opportunities for student learning and achievement (Sheilds, 2010). Analysis of the lived experiences of study participants indicated that, as self-identified engaged faculty, they feel committed to advancing this vision.

Recommendations for Action

Participants in the study were all drawn from a single academic institution in the midst of a multi-year effort to transition campus assessment culture. The first recommendation for action is rooted in the multi-year plan advanced by academic administration at the study site. All faculty accounts linked their current valuing of and engagement in OA to increased clarity of process and expectations. While all were invested in their own professional practice, the new direction in institutional OA process had broadened their view and understanding of how individual classes taught contribute to the greater whole of program curricula and ultimately to expectations for student achievement. As a result, institutions seeking to transform local assessment culture are urged to take the time to create a multi-year, phase-gated plan through

which faculty have on-going opportunities to participate, develop understanding, and become partners in the process.

The second recommendation stemming from this study is related to ownership of the OA process. The faculty lived experience narratives clearly articulate a preference for multi-level ownership of institutional OA processes. The portrait of leadership that emerged from the study data would best be described as shared and pervasive. At the unit level, faculty felt that there was substantial latitude to consider, refine, and meaning-make within the emerging institutional OA framework. Study participants shared their feelings that these activities at the unit level provided the best setting the foster further faculty engagement, due to the faculty driven approach, peer-to-peer mentoring, and collaborative opportunities. Therefore, it is recommended that any effort to establish an institutional culture of evidence be centered on the premise that practice and process must remain faculty driven but administratively supported.

Finally, it is recommended that institutions intent on improving local assessment connect the efforts to the scholarship of teaching and learning, rather than to a need to respond to accountability mandates. Although all study participants were aware that OA was driven by external pressures, each connected their feeling of engagement to the ability to use OA to improve their professional practice as educators. Once OA became important to them personally as an integral part of their professional identity, study participants expressed a strong commitment to remaining involved and to reaching out to other faculty to engage them in the work as well.

Recommendations for Further Study

Three areas were identified as opportunities for future study. The first opportunity involves the population included in the study, who all self-identified as being more engaged in OA than in the past. As a subsequent inquiry, the lived experiences of faculty who have

experienced no change in engagement and/or who do not feel engaged in OA could be investigated. A second possibility for future study would be to conduct interviews with faculty at other institutions undergoing assessment culture change and compare those findings to those of this study. As a third alterative, a study to explore the relationship between the educator-orientation shared by the study faculty and positive feelings about institutional OA efforts could be conducted. This type of inquiry could further address the gaps in the literature identified earlier.

Conclusion

This phenomenological study sought to give voice to the lived experiences of faculty within a transitioning assessment culture–specifically, faculty who self-identified as being more engaged than in the past. The portrait of the phenomenon that emerged indicated that such faculty share the characteristic of being highly invested in their roles as educators, feeling the responsibility to not only ensure that their professional practice in the classroom facilitates meaningful student learning, but also the responsibility to contribute to work that ensures continuous improvement of the entire academic program and the institution as a whole. While they appreciate this work is often stimulated by external stakeholder mandates, they have embraced OA as a critical process for the institution. They appreciate that not all of their peers shared their commitment to OA, however they believe that given time most will elect to contribute. Collaborative opportunities with peers were cited as critical to fostering their own growing sense of engagement and they feel that other faculty will have a similar experience as the OA initiative expands. Clarity of intent, leadership of the change initiative and provision of resources, such as focused in-services, step-by-step directives, and technology tools, were also identified as critical supporting elements to the ongoing OA initiative.

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Appendix A: Email Correspondence

Awareness building email

Email Subject Line:	Upcoming dissertation study on Faculty & OA

Hello [*insert name of Dept. Chair or UOAC rep],*

I am contacting you today to acquaint you with a study that I am conducting as part of my doctoral work at the University of New England. The study will explore faculty experiences with outcomes assessment (OA) within a transitioning assessment culture. In particular, I would like to interview faculty members who consider themselves to be more engaged in OA presently than in the past. I would like to understand what that process has been like and what may have contributed to this change.
Faculty in your department will receive a study invitation on Wednesday, December 2, 2015. I would greatly appreciate any support you would be able to lend in encouraging eligible faculty to commit to participate by the deadline of December 10, 2015. Participation in this study is voluntary and the decision to participate will have no impact on current or future relations with the University of New England or Johnson & Wales University.

As always, thank you for your consideration and should you have any questions, please feel free to reach out to me,
Jenn

First recruitment e-mail message

Email Subject Line:	Participants needed for Dissertation Study on faculty and OA

Hello everyone,
I am contacting you today to invite you to participate in a study I am conducting as part of my doctoral work at the University of New England. An overview of the study is provided below.
My study is focused on faculty experiences with outcomes assessment (OA) within a transitioning assessment culture. In particular, I would like to interview faculty members who consider themselves to be more engaged in OA presently than in the past. I would like to understand what that process has been like and what may have contributed to this change.

Participation in the study is voluntary and the decision to participate will have no impact on current or future relations with the University of New England or Johnson & Wales University. The study will involve a 60-minute interview to be scheduled in mid-January. A second, shorter interview may be requested. All interviews will take place on the Providence Campus. Participants will also be asked to review their individual interview transcript for accuracy and the interpretations drawn from it. In total, I do not expect the time commitment involved to be greater than two and a half hours.

If you consider yourself to be more engaged in OA now than in the past and would like to be considered for participation in this study, please respond to this email by December 10, 2015 and include the following information:

- Name:
- Department:
- What are your current university committee assignments?

Thank you for your consideration and support,
Jenn

Second recruitment e-mail message

Email Subject Line:	Reminder re: Dissertation Study on faculty and OA

Hello everyone,

This is a follow-up email to my invitation for you to participate in a study I am conducting as part of my doctoral work at the University of New England. Participation in the study is voluntary and the decision to participate will have no impact on current or future relations with the University of New England or Johnson & Wales University.

As a reminder, my study is focused on faculty experiences with outcomes assessment (OA) within a transitioning assessment culture. The full text of my original invitation appears below this reminder message. **The deadline for responding to this invitation is Thursday, December 10, 2015.**

If you have not already responded but consider yourself to be more engaged in OA now than in the past and would like to be considered for participation in this study, please respond to this email with the following information:

- Name:
- Department:
- What are your current university committee assignments?

Thank you for your consideration and support,
Jenn

Selection as a Participant Email

Email Subject Line:	Selection for Dissertation Study on faculty and OA

Hello [*insert name]*,

Thank you for responding to the invitation to participate in the study of faculty experiences with outcomes assessment (OA) within a transitioning assessment culture. I am pleased to inform you that you have been selected to participate and I look forward to the opportunity to include your unique perspectives as part of the research. The remainder of this email outlines what will happen next. Should you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to contact me directly.

Consent Form:

- The consent form for this study is attached to this email. It should be reviewed carefully.
- As is stated in the consent form, participation in this study is voluntary and the decision to participate will have no impact on current or future relations with the University of New England or Johnson & Wales University.
- If you have any questions regarding the consent form, you should contact me.
- **After you have reviewed the consent form, please respond to this email to indicate you agree with the terms outlined**. *Note: completion of a consent form is a requirement of participating in this study.*
- On the day of your interview, you will be asked to sign two copies of the consent form. You will keep one copy and I will retain the other as part of the records for the study.

(Selection as a Participant Email -- continued)

The Interview:

- Once I have received an email from you indicating your agreement with the consent form, I will contact you to schedule an interview in January 2016.
- Interviews will last one hour and will take place in the Faculty Center (downcity campus)
- You will receive a confirmation email and an Outlook meeting request for the date and time of the interview. A reminder email will be sent 2 days prior.

Once again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this study,

Jenn

Consent Confirmation Email

Email Subject Line:	Re: Re: Selection for Dissertation Study on faculty and OA *(note: this will be a return email to the participant's return email, hence the "re: re:" in the email subject line)*

Hello [*insert name]*,

Thank you for your return email indicating that you consent to the terms of the study. I will be in touch within the next couple of days to schedule your interview.

Once again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this study,

Jenn

Interview Confirmation Email

Email Subject Line:	Interview Appointment for Dissertation Study on faculty and OA

Hello [*insert name]*,

It was a pleasure to speak with you earlier today and I am looking forward to our upcoming interview. As a reminder, the interview will take place at the Faculty Center (downcity campus) and will last approximately 60 minutes. Before the interview begins, you will be asked to sign a two copies of the consent form shared with you when you were selected for the study. You will keep one copy of the form, and I will retain the other. The interview will be recorded and your will be asked to review the transcript for accuracy once it is complete.

Your interview is schedule for: **Day/ Date/ Year** at **Time.** You will also receive an Outlook meeting invitation through the JWU email system. A reminder email will be sent 2 days in advance. Should you find that you need to reschedule your interview, please contact me as soon as possible.

Once again, thank you for your willingness to participate in this study,

Jenn

Post-Interview Email

Email Subject Line:	Thank you!

Hello [*insert name]*,

Thank you so much for your participation in yesterday's interview. A transcript of your interview is being completed and should be available within 14 days. Once I have received it, I will make arrangements to deliver a hard copy for your review. You will have 1 week to review the transcript for accuracy and notify me that it is ready for pick-up.

Take Care,
Jenn

Non-selection as a Participant Email

Email Subject Line:	Participation in Dissertation Study on faculty and OA

Hello [*insert name]*,
Thank you for expressing your interest in the study of faculty experiences with outcomes assessment (OA) within a transitioning assessment culture. I have been so encouraged by the overwhelming response of the faculty to my request for participants. However, due to the parameters of the study, only a small sample in required. For this reason, you were not selected for participation. Should you be interested in reviewing the study results, please feel free to contact me in the Fall of 2016, and I will be happy to share them with you.

With appreciation,
Jenn

Appendix B: Consent for Participation in Research Form

UNIVERSITY OF NEW ENGLAND CONSENT FOR PARTICIPATION IN RESEARCH

Project Title: *Embracing a culture of evidence: a phenomenological study of faculty experience within a transitioning assessment culture.*

Principal Investigator(s):

Jennifer A. Galipeau
Doctoral Student
University of New England
(401) 439-0864
jgalipeau@une.edu

Marylin Newell, Ph.D.
Dissertation Committee Chair
University of New England
(207) 345-3100
mnewell@collegematters.us

Introduction:

- Please read this form, you may also request that the form is read to you. The purpose of this form is to provide you with information about this research study, and if you choose to participate, document your decision.
- You are encouraged to ask any questions that you may have about this study, now, during or after the project is complete. You can take as much time as you need to decide whether or not you want to participate. Your participation is voluntary.

Why is this study being done?

- Institutions of higher education seek to institute outcomes assessment (OA) processes in response to demands for accountability concerning student achievement.
- Faculty engagement in the outcomes assessment process is important to creating meaningful OA process.
- This study is being done to provide better understanding about what leads faculty to feel more engaged in outcomes assessment work.

Who will be in this study?

- Participants in this study will be fulltime, undergraduate faculty members from the Providence Campus of Johnson & Wales University.
- A total of ten faculty members will be included, selected as follows:
    - College of Culinary Arts – two faculty members
    - School of Business -- two faculty members
    - School of Hospitality -- two faculty members
    - School of Engineering & Design -- two faculty members
    - School of Professional Studies -- two faculty members
- Faculty who teach in the Arts & Science Core (General Education) units, will not be in be included in this study.
- Members of the University Outcomes Assessment Committee (UOAC) are not eligible to be included in this study.

What will I be asked to do?

- You will be asked to participate in a 60-minute interview about your experiences as a faculty member who feels engaged in OA at JWU.
- A second, shorter interview may be requested.
- The researcher will conduct all interviews.
- Your interview(s) will be recorded and transcribed.
- You will be asked to review your transcribed interview(s) for accuracy.
- You will be asked to review the write up of analysis and findings extracted from your interview(s).
- Your time commitment is not expected to exceed two and a half hours.
- You will not be compensated for participation in this project.

What are the possible risks of taking part in this study?

- There are no foreseeable risks associated with participation in this study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part in this study?

- There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this study. There may be a benefit to others as the insights gained from the research may provide better understanding of the faculty perspective and lived experience of engaging in OA work within higher education.

What will it cost me?

- Participants will incur no costs related to participation in this study.

How will my privacy be protected?

- Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym during the interview that will be used throughout analysis and reporting.
- Although demographic information will be collected in the course of study, it will not be included in reporting, other than to provide an aggregate description of population included in the study. This demographic information will include academic rank, terminal degree status, institutional longevity, gender, and age.
- Findings from this study will be reported as part of researcher's doctoral dissertation.

How will my data be kept confidential?

- Each participant will be assigned a pseudonym during the interview that will be used throughout analysis and reporting.
- Interview recordings will be transcribed by a professional transcription service. Once transcribed, the interview recordings will be destroyed. This is anticipated to occur within one year of the taping.
- All records related to this study will be kept at the home of the researcher in a locked file. No records will be stored at the Johnson & Wales University campus.
- All individually identifiable data will be destroyed once the study is complete.
- Participants in the study may request a copy of the findings.
- Please note that regulatory agencies and the Institutional Review Board may review the research records.
- A copy of your signed consent form will be maintained by the principal investigator for at least 3 years after the project is complete before it is destroyed. The consent forms will be stored in a secure location that only the researcher will have access to and will not be affiliated with any data obtained during the project.

What are my rights as a research participant?

- Your participation is voluntary.
- Your decision to participate will have no impact on your current or future relations with the University of New England or Johnson & Wales University.
- You may skip or refuse to answer any question for any reason.
- If you choose not to participate there is no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive. You are free to withdraw from this research study at any time, for any reason. If you choose to withdraw from the research there will be no penalty to you and you will not lose any benefits that you are otherwise entitled to receive.

What other options do I have?

- You may choose not to participate.
- You may choose to withdraw from the study at any time.

Whom may I contact with questions?

- The researcher conducting this study is Jennifer A. Galipeau, Doctoral Student**.** For questions or more information concerning this research you may contact her at (401) 439-0864 or by email at jgalipeau@une.edu.
- The faculty advisor for this study is Marylin Newell, Ph.D. She may be contacted by phone: (207) 345-3100 or by email: mnewell@collegematters.us.
- If you choose to participate in this research study and believe you may have suffered a research related injury, please contact Marylin Newell, Ph.D. at (207) 345-3100 or mnewell@collegematters.us.
- If you have any questions or concerns about your rights as a research subject, you may call Olgun Guvench, M.D. Ph.D., Chair of the UNE Institutional Review Board at (207) 221-4171 or irb@une.edu.

Will I receive a copy of this consent form?

- You will be given a copy of this consent form.

Participant's Statement

I understand the above description of this research and the risks and benefits associated with my participation as a research subject. I agree to take part in the research and do so voluntarily.

Participant's signature or Legally authorized representative	Date
Printed name	

Researcher's Statement

The participant named above had sufficient time to consider the information, had an opportunity to ask questions, and voluntarily agreed to be in this study.

Researcher's signature	Date
Printed name	

Appendix C: Interview Protocol

Interview Protocol for Dissertation Research Study

Faculty experience within a transitioning assessment culture

1. **Introduction:** Researcher will introduce self to participant and thank him/her for participating. This will be followed by a review of the goals of the study, the duration of the study, and the topics to be discussed during the interview:

   The focus of this study is to gain understanding the faculty-lived experience within a transitioning assessment culture. As a faculty member at JWU, you have self-identified yourself as being more engaged with outcomes assessment (OA) than in the past. Today I will be asking you questions about what that experience has been like for you. The interview will last no longer than an hour and will be recorded. I may take some notes during the conversation, however these will be limited. You may ask questions at any time during the interview and you are also free to decline to answer a question, should you choose. Lastly, I need you to select a pseudonym for use with this study. You may suggest one or choose one from the list that I have here. [List will be provided to participant to choose a pseudonym, if desired.]

2. **Consent:** Participant will be asked to review consent form that was previously provided and will be asked if he/she has any questions regarding the content. After any questions are addressed, participant will be asked to sign two copies of the consent form. One will be given to the participant and the other will be retained by the researcher.

   Please take a few minutes to review this consent form. It is identical to the one that was shared with you when you agreed to participate in the study.
   [Participant will be given time to read/ review the form.]
   Do you have any questions regarding the terms outlined in the consent form? [If there are questions, they will be addressed.]
   I will now ask you to sign both copies of the consent form. I will sign them as well. You will retain one copy and I will keep the other.

   Thank you. If you are ready, we will now begin with the interview questions.

3. **The Interview Questions:**

Main Question	Probing/ Clarifying Questions
1. I'd like to begin with some demographic questions: a. How long have you been a fulltime faculty member at JWU? b. What is your academic rank? c. What is the highest degree you have obtained?	
2. In responding to the invitation to be part of this study, you indicated that you felt that you were more "engaged" in OA than in the past. Would you please share with me what it mean to you to be a faculty member "engaged in OA"?	*Can you give me an example?* *Could you tell me more about…?*
3. What factors do you think are responsible for your increased engagement in OA?	*Can you tell me more about how [factor] served to support your engagement with OA?* *I'm interested in understanding what (rather than who) has made is possible for you to be more engaged….*
4. Considering how you viewed OA in the past, tell me what is different about your perceptions today? What is responsible for this change?	*When did this start to change?* *Why do you think it start to change?* *Who else has responsibility for OA? What are the differences between official and unofficial responsibilities? How so? Who should have primary responsibility?*
5. What do you see as the primary purpose of institutional assessment initiatives – for example, those in place at JWU?	*How prevalent do you think this perception is? How has this understanding evolved? What is responsible for this change?*

6. In your view, who has primary responsibility for OA within JWU? How do you feel about this?	*Has it always been this way? Can you give me example of why you believe this to be true?*
7. Describe for me what it is like to be a faculty member involved in OA.	*What are the positive aspects of being involved? What are the negative aspects? If you could change one thing, what would it be?*
8. How would you describe assessment culture at JWU to an outsider today? In what ways is this description different from what you would have said in the past? What do you think is responsible for this change?	*What do you mean by …?* *Can you give me an example of…?*
9. What one thing do you think senior administration should understand about faculty, OA, and assessment culture?	*Why do you think this important to share?*
10. Is there anything else you would like to me to know about your experience as a faculty member engaged in OA?	*Tell me more about this…*

4. **Conclusion:** Participant will be thanked for his/her time and be reminded that he/she will be contacted within 14 days to review the interview transcript. If the participant has any additional questions regarding the study or what will happen next, these will be addressed before the interview session formally concludes.

> *Thank you so much for your time today. It was so interesting to hear about your experiences and you have provided me with some important new insights. I want to remind you that the recording of this interview will be transcribed and that I will be contacting you within 14 days to provide you with an opportunity to review it. At that time, you will be able to make any corrections needed or provide additional information if desired. Do you have any questions about the study or what will happen next? [If there are questions, these will be addressed before closing the interview.]*
>
> *Thank you once again, for being part of this study. I look forward to connecting with you again soon, and if you have questions in the meantime, please feel free to reach out to me.*