

**STUDENT AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT,
EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH**

Publication Number 1

AMERICAN SERIES IN STUDENT AFFAIRS
PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

Edited by

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STUDENT AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH

**A Guidebook for Graduate Students
and New Professionals**

Edited by

VICKI L. WISE, PH.D.

and

ZEBULUN DAVENPORT, ED.D.

Foreword by Naijian Zhang

(With 13 Other Contributors)



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FOREWORD

Assessment is today's means of modifying tomorrow's instruction.
Carol Ann Tomlinson

Student Affairs Assessment, Evaluation, and Research: A Guidebook for Graduate Students and New Professionals is a valuable tool for all student affairs educators. While this book is designed for those who are preparing to become student affairs educators and for those who are new to this discipline, it is certainly filled with information and resources for entry-level, mid-level, and senior-level professionals. This book is not only a blueprint but also a global positioning system on assessment, evaluation, and research in student affairs to guide you in the process of helping and educating students on the American college and university campus in the twenty-first century. Furthermore, this book is a bridge that connects between who you are today and who you want to be as a student affairs educator tomorrow. It will help you operationalize your goal to become a competent practitioner in the area of assessment, evaluation, and research in student affairs of higher education. It is a unique and valuable source to develop your professional competency.

Student Affairs Assessment, Evaluation, and Research: A Guidebook for Graduate Students and New Professionals is an essential volume in the *American Series in Student Affairs Practice and Professional Identity in the 21st Century*. The significance of this book is due to its focus on the practical value of assessment, evaluation, and research, a professional competency area for student affairs educators articulated by ACPA/NASPA in both 2010 and 2015. This book has aimed to have a complete reflection of this competency area.

The core value of *Student Affairs Assessment, Evaluation, and Research: A Guidebook for Graduate Students and New Professionals* is the organized knowledge and organized experiences or wisdoms in assessment, evaluation, and research from both the editors and all the chapter authors. The editors of the book, Dr. Vicki L. Wise and Dr. Zebulun Davenport, are true scientists and practitioners in the field of student affairs in higher education. Playing critical roles in assessment, evaluation, and research at different higher education institutions, they have gained numerous years of hands-on experiences

through the integration of their knowledge into practice. As experts in student affairs of higher education, Dr. Wise and Dr. Davenport have identified high quality practitioners and scholars in assessment, evaluation, and research from colleges and universities and higher-education industry and completed this book project. These authors all hold senior-level positions, and together as a team have enriched this book with their precious knowledge and experiences and now present it as a gift to you—the future and new student affairs educators.

This book has another unique dimension in that it assists you to learn how to develop your professional competency and achieve the foundational, intermediate, and advanced outcomes as identified by ACPA/NASPA. Specifically, it first helps you develop your ability to understand and differentiate among assessment, evaluation, and research. Second, the book helps you learn how to design, conduct, and critique AER. Third, the text guides you to develop competency in appropriate data collection and data analysis. Fourth, the book aids you to foster your professional competency in correct data interpreting, reporting, and using results.

Student Affairs Assessment, Evaluation, and Research: A Guidebook for Graduate Students and New Professionals' next unique dimension is that it facilitates you to learn the value of assessment and the ethical principles associated with assessment and evaluation. Student affairs educators must adhere to the profession's ethical standards and follow the institution's policies and procedures. As being said, future and new student affairs educators must be cognizant of the political, cultural, and social aspects of assessment, evaluation, and research. The book provides you with the tools to develop your professional competency as leaders in the student affairs profession.

Its final unique dimension is that it has accurately reflected the three themes of the *American Series in Student Affairs Practice and Professional Identity in the 21st Century*—professional competencies, professional identity, and application. To accomplish this goal, Dr. Wise and Dr. Davenport with all other chapter authors have skillfully woven the assessment, evaluation, and research (AER) competency into student affairs educators' professional identity. The book provides graduate students in student affairs programs and new student affairs educators with not only why professional identity is important in assessment, evaluation, and research but also knowledge and skills in how to build their professional identity with the competency in practice.

The *American Series in Student Affairs Practice and Professional Identity in the 21st Century* is a unique book series that creates an integration of all ten professional competency areas for student affairs educators outlined by the College Student Educators International (ACPA) and the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA) in 2015. The series reflects three major themes: professional competencies development, professional

identity construction, and case illustrations for theory translation into application. All volumes in the series are targeting graduate students in student affairs programs and new student affairs educators. The series blends contemporary theory with current research and empirical support and uses case illustrations to facilitate the readers' ability to translate what they have learned into application and decision making. Each volume focuses on one area of professional competency and at the same time addresses some major aspects of the Interaction of Competencies. The series helps graduate students in student affairs programs and new student affairs educators develop their professional competencies (ACPA/NASPA) by (1) constructing their personal and ethical foundations; (2) understanding the values, philosophy, and history of student affairs; (3) strengthening their ability in assessment, evaluation, and research; (4) gaining knowledge, skills, and dispositions relating to law, policy, and governance; (5) familiarizing with and learning how to effectively utilize organizational and human resources; (6) learning leadership knowledge and developing leadership skills; (7) understanding oppression, privilege, power, and then learning how to understand social justice and apply it in practice; (8) acquiring student development theories and learning how to use them to inform their practice; (9) familiarizing themselves with technologies and implementing digital means and resources into practice; and (10) gaining advising and supporting knowledge, skills, and dispositions. As a result, the series helps graduate students in student affairs programs and new student affairs educators foster their professional identity and ultimately achieve their goal of the whole-person education.

Naijian Zhang, Ph.D.

PREFACE

This book is a part of the American Series in Student Affairs Practice and Professional Identity in the Twenty-First Century. The series exposes graduate students and new professionals to the professional competency of Assessment, Evaluation, and Research in student affairs as articulated in the ACPA and NASPA *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2015). Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER) is one of the 10 professional competency areas identified for student affairs educators. The professional competency areas lay out essential knowledge, skills, and dispositions expected of all student affairs educators, regardless of functional area or specialization within the field (p. 7). The focus throughout this book is developing a professional practice and identity based on the values, philosophy, and history of the profession. In keeping with the theme of the series, this book emphasizes professional competency, professional identity, and application.

Never before in the history of this discipline has it been more important for student affairs professionals to obtain the skills and competencies necessary to assess their programs and services and share their findings with invested audiences. For several valid reasons, the expectations for assessment, evaluation, and research have increased. These factors include, but are not limited to, increased costs of education (i.e., tuition and fees), diminished funding from federal and state agencies, increased budget cuts on college campuses, increased scrutiny for accountability and quality by accrediting bodies, and questioning from parents and students about the worth of a college degree for career preparation and employment given the costs associated with obtaining said degree.

Moreover, increased demand for evidence of success of high-impact practices (HIPS) and cocurricular high-impact practices (CHIPS) continues to rise. Thus, it is vital that student affairs professionals learn the value of AER early in their careers. Cocurricular experiences is an area in which student affairs makes relevant contributions and uniquely completes the educational mission of the college experience. Therefore, understanding the value

of high-quality cocurricular programs, continuous improvement, and the need to validate learning outside of the classroom are necessary for all student affairs professionals. In fact, AER should be a mandatory component of every higher education in student affairs (HESA) program in the country.

This book provides the reader with a unique approach to learning and understanding AER. It is designed in a format that describes/defines this competency at the foundational, intermediate, and advanced outcomes levels; suggests ways to apply this competency in practice through case studies from student affairs; and provides tools for assessment of competency understanding.

Book Overview

This book opens with an exploration of the history of assessment in higher education, in general, and then student affairs, more specifically. Having established a historical perspective, the reader then delves into chapters that align with the Assessment, Evaluation, and Research (AER) competency and accompanying rubric (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2016). Chapters 2–8 also include relevant terminology necessary for understanding, the competency applied to a case study, and an opportunity for self-assessment.

Chapter 1, “The Status of Assessment, Evaluation, and Research in Student Affairs,” provides the framework for the status of AER through a glance into seminal publications that have shaped this competency. The importance of and attention to assessment, evaluation, and research in higher education is not a recent phenomenon. Contemporary discussions and guidance regarding AER are firmly rooted in the contributions and insights of professionals who long preceded us. The authors close this chapter with a discussion of the role of higher education and student affairs (HESA) graduate programs in building capacity in AER. Presenting this background information sets the stage for addressing and applying AER competency.

Chapter 2, “The Development of Competencies in Assessment, Evaluation, and Research,” with Terms and Concepts,” explores the history of the Professional Competency Areas for student affairs educators, in general, and the AER competency, more specifically. Readers examine AER at the three levels of outcomes—foundational, intermediate, and advanced—as well as their aligned rubrics. The author provides definitions for relevant terms and concepts associated with assessment, program review, evaluation, planning, and research, as well as terms presented in subsequent chapters for readers to explore. Understanding and applying AER terminology is essential for one’s own AER professional development.

Chapter 3, “Student Affairs Assessment in the Broader Institutional Context: Values, Ethics, and Politics,” examines the value of assessment

and the ethical principles associated with data collection, management, analysis, and reporting. The need to understand and follow institutional policies and procedures, to adhere to standards, and to navigate institutional politics effectively is essential to sustain a culture of assessment that uses results for continuous improvement. The reader is asked to develop an ability to connect the concepts of data and information literacy, data quality, and data use; to identify the roles of transparency and political nuance; to understand the necessity of collaboration and attention to the needs of stakeholders; and the necessity of developing a culture of evidence.

Chapter 4, “Assessment, Evaluation, and Research Design,” underscores the importance of having theoretical frameworks that align with organizational outcomes, goals, and values. This chapter examines the ability to create learner-centered outcomes that align with divisional and institutional priorities, and to design and lead a process-oriented strategy to address the assessment’s purpose or research questions. The reader is asked to develop an aptitude to think critically and systematically about questions and problems of quality assessment practice. By engaging in an outcomes-based approach, intentional processes and strategies, and a disposition to evidence-based, data-informed work, the reader will master and advance through AER design competency.

Chapter 5, “Methodology, Data Collection, and Data Analysis,” informs the reader of the strengths and limits of research methodologies. The ability to match methodology with purpose of assessment and guiding questions and to collect and analyze data are essential to quality AER practice, as is understanding issues of reliability and validity. Readers are implored to take a critical stance in collecting and analyzing data with rigorous attention to detail, and as they apply this competency, to develop these two habits of practice. One, plan as much as possible. Strive to begin with the context, goals, and research questions of your AER effort, and then align the methodology and data collection that best meets those demands. Second, rely on the expertise of others through engagement in collaborations and resource use to advance your AER efforts. These habits are valuable guides to expand your own understanding and skills.

Chapter 6, “Interpreting, Reporting, and Using Results,” encourages the reader to explore how to interpret data in practical terms that are relevant to the institutional context, to present results concisely in reports that are useful to a variety of audiences, and to use findings to make informed decisions and to align resources. In particular, this chapter focuses on interpreting data, reporting findings, and utilizing results in ways that support learning in cocurricular programs. Knowing how to interpret and present data in ways that communicate a story is critical to the work of student affairs professionals. Readers will be exposed to skills and techniques

that will assist in their development to collaborate, to represent findings accurately and fairly, and to share interpretations with stakeholders, including students.

Chapter 7, “The Role of Assessment, Evaluation, and Research in Professional Development and Professional Identity,” encourages the reader to become actively engaged in service and leadership within the profession on many levels including involvement with professional associations. Assessment, evaluation, and research play a significant role in the identity and career development of all student affairs professionals. Therefore, readers are encouraged to keep AER central to their professional identity. This chapter encourages readers to participate in opportunities to identify and incorporate emerging values of the profession into their professional practice. The assessment, evaluation, and research framework can also guide areas of needed professional skill development, which can advance assessment practice at the departmental or divisional levels.

Chapter 8, “The Scholarship of Assessment, Evaluation, and Research in Student Affairs,” implores the reader to think of the practice of AER alongside the practice of scholarship. Readers are encouraged to actualize AER by collaborating with faculty and staff for teaching, research, and scholarship regarding the profession; and by contributing to the research, scholarship, and expansion of knowledge within the profession. The authors provide a four-step process for the reader to learn, engage, and develop a scholar-practitioner approach to this discipline.

ABOUT THE EDITORS, CONTRIBUTORS, AND REVIEWERS

About the Editors

Vicki L. Wise, Ph.D., is the Director of Assessment and Accreditation in the College of Public Health and Human Sciences at Oregon State University. In her previous role as Associate Director for Teaching, Learning, and Assessment, she was instrumental in leading Portland State University (PSU) into a new era of quality assessment practice and accountability by integrating assessment processes across levels from the course to the program to the institution. Previously, at PSU, she served as Director of Student Affairs Assessment & Research. Prior to PSU, she held the positions of Director of Assessment and Evaluation for the College of Education, Assistant Director for Institutional Research, and Assistant Professor/Research Administrator in the Center for Assessment and Research Studies, all at James Madison University. She earned her Ph.D. and M.A. degrees at the University of Nebraska in Psychological and Cultural Studies and Educational Psychology, respectively. Her research interests and publications are in the area of applied assessment practice in higher education.

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Sara J. Finney, Ph.D., is an Associate Director in the Center for Assessment & Research Studies, and a Professor in the Department of Graduate Psychology, both at James Madison University. Since 2001, Dr. Finney has been providing outcomes assessment-related support to professionals in the Division of Student Affairs at James Madison University. Most recently, she has overseen the creation of initiatives to emphasize the use of assessment results for learning improvement. Dr. Finney's work evaluating the effectiveness of university educational programming has garnered four national awards from the American College Personnel Association (ACPA) and the Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education Association (NASPA). Dr. Finney has published over 55 articles and chapters, with her students co-authoring over 70 percent of these publications. Her research involves the study of test-taking motivation and emotions during institutional accountability testing, the

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S. Jeanne Horst, Ph.D.
Sara J. Finney, Ph.D.
Kimberly Yousey-Elsener, Ph.D.
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I have heard it said that the joy is in the journey, and I believe this now more than ever. Zeb, my dear friend and coeditor, thank you for going with me on this trip. To my dear loved ones who support me, even when I get a little too serious and tunneled vision. I share much love for and gratitude to Don,

Linda, Kim, Joyce, and my former OAI and PSU colleagues.—Vicki

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To all that read this book, read it with due diligence and purpose. You are the future of our discipline and this book is a tool that will aid in your success. To borrow from Sir Francis Bacon's famous quote, "Knowledge itself is power," we urge you to use the knowledge and wisdom shared in this book to open doors, create opportunities, and chart your paths for success.

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**STUDENT AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT,
EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH**

Chapter 1

THE STATUS OF ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH IN STUDENT AFFAIRS

SARA J. FINNEY & S. JEANNE HORST

The importance of and attention to assessment, evaluation, and research (AER) in higher education is not a recent phenomenon. Contemporary discussions and guidance regarding AER are firmly rooted in the contributions and insights of professionals who long preceded us. To frame the importance of AER in student affairs, we begin this chapter with a brief history of higher education outcomes assessment, with an emphasis on milestones within the domain of student affairs. As we will see, AER is ever-present throughout our history. We then highlight seminal AER documents and resources used to define, develop, and assess AER competencies. These seminal documents include the current *Professional Competency Areas for Student Affairs Educators* (American College Personnel Association & National Association of Student Personnel Administrators, 2015). Competency in AER is the focus of this book. We close the chapter with a discussion of the role of higher education and student affairs (HESA) graduate programs in building capacity in AER. As noted in the Preface, the goal of this book is to foster a student affairs practitioner's development of professional practice and identity based on the values, philosophy, and history of the profession. Thus, presenting this background information sets the stage for addressing and applying AER competency.

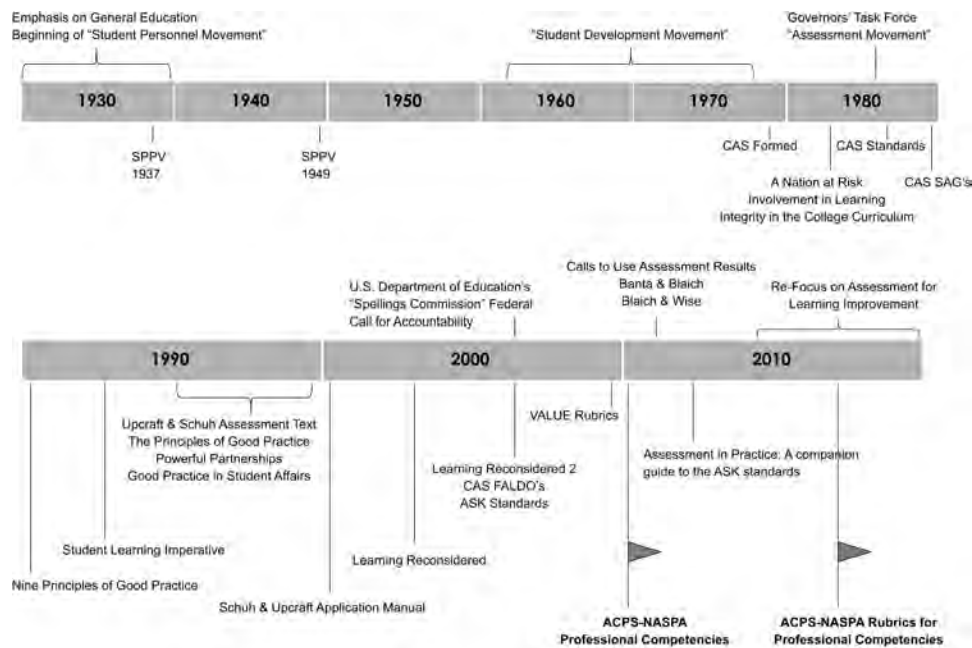


Figure 1.1. Timeline of major events with movements/calls to action on top of the timeline and documents on the bottom of the timeline.

A Brief History of Outcomes Assessment in Higher Education

Although some may view student affairs assessment as a relatively new endeavor, it has deep roots in higher education, in fact, as early as the 1930s (see Figure 1.1). Moreover, it is impossible to disentangle the emergence of student affairs assessment from societal, governmental, and economic forces, as described below.

1930s to 1950s: The Underpinnings of Student Affairs Assessment

The history of student affairs assessment is couched within the broader history of higher education. Derived from the European university model, the U.S. university in the nineteenth century was economically and socially important to the industrial growth of the country (Altbach, 1991). During the post-Civil War era, colleges and universities focused primarily on students' intellect and acquisition of discipline-specific knowledge (American Council on Education, 1937). In the 1930s, there was a period of post-World War I growth in higher education that was accompanied by a shift from discipline-specific

intellectualism to an emphasis on general education (Ewell, 1991). Early attempts at general education assessment were undertaken in the 1930s, such as the standardized testing for sophomores to seniors in the Pennsylvania Study and standardized testing in the Cooperative Study of General Education (Steedle, 2010).

Concurrent with the emphasis on general education (Ewell, 1991), the origin of student affairs assessment is traced to the 1937 American Council on Education publication, *The Student Personnel Point of View (SPPV)*. The SPPV emphasized focusing on “the student as a whole” (American Council on Education, 1937, p. 1), which represented the post-Civil-War shift from solely focusing upon students’ acquisition of knowledge. The SPPV provided recommendations about the provision and evaluation of services for the whole student, including services built to foster skills, attitudes, and knowledge that now we consider important, such as civic engagement, sense of belonging, and ethical reasoning. The SPPV statement that student personnel programs should include an emphasis “on studies designed to evaluate and improve these functions and services” (American Council on Education, 1937, p. 4) foreshadowed the current emphasis on AER. The 1949 edition of the SPPV upheld the call for “A continuing program of evaluation of student personnel services and of the educational program to ensure the achievement by students of the objectives for which this program is designed” (American Council on Education, 1949, p. 29). Recommendations for types of evaluation data were broad, including student and faculty satisfaction, use of services, quality of staff training, and relationships between student affairs professionals and with faculty. Moreover, the importance of research from various domains (e.g., psychology, education, sociology) when developing and evaluating services is a major emphasis of the SPPV, which includes calls for continual evidence-based improvement that are still made today.

1960 to late 1970s: Focus on Program Evaluation and Student Development

Although called for in the early student affairs documents (American Council on Education, 1937, 1949), program evaluation in student affairs did not flourish until the 1960s and 1970s, running parallel with a broader societal trend toward large-scale government-funded programs (Ewell, 2002). Program evaluation involved systematic

investigation of program effectiveness, typically in the form of program reviews and strategic plans; it led to a proliferation of surveys about student perceptions of and satisfaction with programs.

As well during this era, researchers examined student dispositions and behaviors, including ways in which student characteristics related to academic success (Kuh, Gonyea, & Rodriguez, 2002). Studies often focused on measuring aspects of student retention, attitudes, and cognitive gain, resulting in a proliferation of theories about student learning (Ewell, 2002). The trend influenced the creation of tools for assessing student characteristics. For example, the creation of a measure of student self-esteem (Rosenberg & Simmons, 1971) led to a proliferation of research about societal factors related to racial differences in student success.

The hallmark of this era was the student development movement: applying human development theories to college students. In the early 1970s, several seminal documents focused on student development and were targeted toward the student affairs professional. For example, the ACPA monograph *Student Development in Tomorrow's Higher Education: A Return to the Academy* (Brown, 1972) provided a critical review of student development and the role of student affairs personnel in promoting development. One recommendation was that "Colleges and universities should establish expectations for students and assess outcomes that cover the broad ranges of human behavior including the intellectual, personal-social, esthetic, cultural, and even the psychomotor dimensions" (Brown, 1972, p. 44). In short, the student development movement led to intentional student affairs programming, or "interventions" (Bloland, 1991, p. 3), aligned with and intended to promote student development.

Late 1970s to mid-1980s: Development and Distribution of the CAS Standards

Given the focus in the 1960s and 1970s on program evaluation, the formation of the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) in 1979 was a natural next step. The result, in 1986, was a set of standards intended for quality assurance via program review and self-study of 16 functional areas (e.g., academic advising, career services, service-learning) and graduate professional preparation programs. In 1988, CAS provided Self-Assessment Guides (SAGs) as tools to identify program strengths and deficiencies, to

enhance program impact on student learning and development, and to guide staff development.

The CAS standards, now in their ninth edition (Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education, 2015), encompass 44 different functional areas, as well as a set of masters-level HESA academic program standards (<http://www.cas.edu/standards>). The CAS standards remain the most comprehensive collection of standards available for student affairs; they include standards of excellence, common ethical principles, and current student learning and development outcomes. Today, CAS consists of 41 higher education professional associations.

Underlying the CAS standards are a set of guiding principles or core beliefs, organized into five broad categories: students and their environment; diversity/multiculturalism; health engendering environments; organization, leadership, and human resources; and ethical considerations (Sharp, 2017). The early SPPV (1937) admonition to consider the student as a whole person remains evident within the CAS guiding principles. Undergirding each set of functional area standards are the General Standards (e.g., Mission, Program, Ethics, Assessment; Sharp, 2017), which provide a core framework for all areas and promote similarities across departments and institutions (Sharp, 2017). Note that assessment is a General Standard. In sum, the CAS standards set the stage for and remain prominent in the current-day emphasis on assessment of all student affairs programs.

Mid-1980s to 1990: Focus on Student Learning Rather than General Program Effectiveness

During the mid-1980s to 1990 era of educational reform, higher education leaders called for a focus on student learning. *A Nation at Risk* (Gardner, 1983) bemoaned the state of the educational system and called for major educational reforms. A year later, the National Institute of Education's Study Group on the Conditions of Excellence in American Higher Education published *Involvement in Learning* (1984). The study group included and was greatly influenced by education leader, Alexander Astin. The report authors emphasized that excellence in education must be centered on student learning, and that colleges should systematically assess their students' learning. Echoing a similar theme, the Association for American Colleges' report, *Integrity in the College Curriculum: A Report to the Academic Community* (1985),

identified nine areas important to a liberal education curriculum (e.g., critical thinking, multicultural experiences) and included multiple calls for accountability and assessment.

Calls for accountability were further stimulated by a push from U.S. state governors. Governors' task forces were formed to address student learning concerns; their emphasis was on student learning outcomes assessment data (Ashcroft, 1986). The task forces recommended that "States should insist that colleges assess what students actually learn while in college" (Alexander, 1986, p. 202). The task forces also encouraged accrediting bodies to hold colleges and universities accountable for providing evidence of student learning. The work of the task forces culminated in two influential National Governors' Association reports encouraging U.S. educational reform. One report questioned the extent to which students learn during college (Alexander, Clinton, & Kean, 1986). The other report noted a lack of consensus about the definition of "assessment" and recommended allocation of resources for improving assessment programs (Education Commission of the States, 1986). The reports led to the "assessment movement" (Ewell, 2002, p. 7), which called for governors to require institutions to assess student learning in order to document the magnitude of learning and to evaluate program quality.

1990s to 2000: Commitment to Learning Outcomes Assessment "On Paper," not "Practice"

The multiple reports generated during the previous decade led to a commitment to learning outcomes assessment "on paper." However, although assessment was mandated in most U.S. states by the 1990s, there was no consistency in definition or practice (Ewell, 2002). The lack of congruence between what was called for "on paper" and what was done in practice led to the creation of several important documents further rationalizing the need for and clarifying the characteristics of student learning outcomes assessment.

First, the American Association for Higher Education (AAHE, 1992) created the *Nine Principles of Good Practice for Assessing Student Learning*, which provided clear criteria for incorporating assessment of student learning into higher education. Then, an ACPA (1994) publication, *The Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs*, called for the intentional creation of programming that fosters student learning, where student learning is considered cognitive competence