

# STUDENT AFFAIRS ASSESSMENT, EVALUATION, AND RESEARCH

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*A GUIDEBOOK FOR GRADUATE STUDENTS  
AND NEW PROFESSIONALS*



**VICKI L. WISE · ZEBULUN R. DAVENPORT**

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

Publication Number 1

AMERICAN SERIES IN STUDENT AFFAIRS  
PRACTICE AND PROFESSIONAL IDENTITY

*Edited by*

NAIJIAN ZHANG, PH.D.

*West Chester University  
Department of Counselor Education  
West Chester, PA*

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**A Guidebook for Graduate Students  
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**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.

**Zebulun R. Davenport, Ed.D.**, is the Vice President for Student Affairs at West Chester University. He earned his Doctorate in Higher Education and Leadership from Nova Southeastern University, a Master of Education in College Student Personnel Administration, and a Bachelor of Science in Communications/Public Relations with a minor in Human Services from James Madison University. His contributions have advanced campus culture, organizational structure, and student success. His expertise includes the areas of student retention, outcomes assessment, strategic planning, and strategies for assisting first-generation college students. Zeb's publications include co-authoring a book entitled *First-Generation College Students—Understanding and Improving the Experience from Recruitment to Commencement*; a chapter in an edited volume entitled *The Student Success Conundrum*, in B. Bontrager (Ed.), *Strategic Enrollment Management: Transforming Higher Education*; and a

chapter in an edited monograph entitled *Creating Collaborative Conditions for Student Success* in S. Whalen (Ed.), *Proceedings of the 8th National Symposium on Student Retention 2012*. He has presented at workshops for numerous public agencies; educational institutions; state, regional, and national conferences; as well as to thousands of college students and professionals throughout his career.

### About the Contributors

**R. Lorraine Bernotsky, D.Phil.,** is the Executive Vice President for Academic Affairs and Provost at West Chester University (WCU) of Pennsylvania. Prior to assuming this role, Dr. Bernotsky served as Associate Provost and Dean of Graduate Studies at WCU, providing leadership in the areas of curriculum development, general education, new program development, program review, assessment, regional and specialized external accreditation, articulation agreements with other two- and four-year institutions, academic policies, and faculty development. During the past two years, she led the approval of WCU's first three doctoral programs, the Doctor of Nursing Practice, the Doctor of Public Administration, and a Doctor of Education, as well as four new master's degree programs. She has also reversed the decline in graduate enrollments, moving from a projected decline of 16.94 percent in fall 2013 to an increase of more than 9 percent over the last three years. Dr. Bernotsky is also the founder of WCU's Center for Social and Economic Policy Research. As the Center's founder and first director, her efforts in development yielded over \$3 million in funding from state, foundation, corporate, and nonprofit sources to sustain the Center's research activities. Dr. Bernotsky earned an M.Phil. and a D.Phil. in Politics from the University of Oxford and an M.A. in Sociology from Temple University.

**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

incorporation of implementation fidelity assessment during the outcomes assessment process, and the application of latent variable modeling techniques to better understand the measurement of psychoeducational constructs.

**Martha Glass, Ph.D.**, is the Senior Director of Assessment and Professional Development at Virginia Tech. Martha coordinates assessment for 23 departments to develop and implement outcomes-based assessment strategies including comprehensive program reviews, that lead to continuous improvement of programs and services that support student learning. She also assists with strategic planning and accreditation activities, and she serves in a leadership role in developing a cocurricular experience for students around division-wide learning goals. Dr. Glass holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and Policy Studies in Higher Education from Virginia Tech. She is also an affiliated faculty member in the Higher Education program at Virginia Tech. She created two courses focused on assessment in higher education. Martha serves on the board of the ACPA Commission on Assessment and Evaluation and is a member of the ACPA/NASPA Rubric Task Force for professional competencies. She was the chair for the 2017 ACPA Assessment Institute.

**Lisa J. Hatfield, Ed.D.**, is the Director of Assessment & Evaluation at Oregon Health & Science University—Portland State University School of Public Health. In her previous experience, Lisa was Director of Learning Center, Portland State University; and adjunct faculty for the Lewis & Clark graduate program in Student Affairs Administration. Her research interests are in the areas of fostering scholarly writing and P-20 education.

S. Jeanne Horst, Ph.D. is an Associate Professor and Associate Assessment Specialist in the Center for Assessment and Research Studies at James Madison University. Jeanne provides assessment consultation for a variety of programs across the James Madison University campus. She has worked with numerous student affairs programs, including service learning, multicultural student services, and international programs. Her student affairs-related publications are in the domains of scale development of attitudinal measures and the application of a mixed methods approach to evaluating student learning.

**Lance Kennedy-Phillips, Ph.D.**, is the Vice Provost for Planning and Assessment at Penn State University. As vice provost, Kennedy-Phillips is responsible for leading the former Office of Planning and Institutional Assessment (OPIA) as well as the new Office for Learning Assessment, established to provide improved university-wide support for this key aspect of its educational mission. Formerly, Lance was the associate vice provost for



institutional research at the University of Illinois, the executive director of the Center for the Study of Student Life at Ohio State, an associate director of institutional planning and research at the University of Florida, and a research associate in institutional research and planning at DePaul University. He attained his Bachelor of Arts in Sociology from Eastern Illinois University and his Master of Education and Doctorate in Higher Education Administration from the University of Nebraska.

**Ross Markle, Ph.D.**, is the Senior Assessment Strategist in the Higher Education Division at Educational Testing Service (ETS). In his current role, he supports ETS' thought leadership efforts in higher education by collaborating with operational and research areas, as well as the higher education community. Ross also works directly with colleges and universities to promote the effective use of assessments and data in student success efforts, particularly with traditionally underserved populations. He has also worked in ETS' Research and Development Division, focusing on the assessment of noncognitive and twenty-first century skills, student success, and student learning outcomes assessment in higher education. Markle's current work focuses on assessing noncognitive skills to improve student success, training faculty and staff in effective student learning outcomes assessment processes, and measuring institutional outcomes such as civic competency and engagement and intercultural competence and diversity. Ross attained a Ph.D. in Assessment and Measurement Psychology from James Madison University, a master's degree in Industrial/Organizational Psychology from Middle Tennessee State University, and Bachelor's degree in Psychology from Edinboro University of Pennsylvania.

**Jennifer Massey, Ph.D.**, is the Associate Vice President (Student Experience) at Western University in Ontario, Canada. Jennifer has more than 15 years of experience working in student affairs in Canada, the U.S., and the U.K. Among her professional colleagues in the field of student affairs, she is best known for her work in vision-casting, strategic planning, and assessment, which is distinguished by her steadfast commitment to student-centered learning and to sophisticated academic and administrative partnerships. Her work in this area has been recognized by professional organizations in both Canada and the United States, including the Canadian Association for College and University Student Services, the Canadian Association for Career and Educators and Employers, NASPA-Student Affairs Professionals in Higher Education, and ACPA-College Student Educators International. Her research interests include geographies of higher education, leadership and civic engagement, student development, cocurricular programming and academic achievement.

**Kyle D. Massey, Ph.D.**, is the Coordinator for Evaluation, Data, and Project Management at Western University. Previously, he was a faculty member in the Faculty of Education at Memorial University of Newfoundland, where he taught undergraduate and graduate courses in the Postsecondary Studies program. He has previously held various administrative positions at several different colleges and universities in both the U.S. and Canada, including roles within student affairs and curricular management of academic programs. Kyle's research interests center on student affairs in the Canadian context, teaching and learning in higher education and faculty development.

**Leah Ewing Ross, Ph.D.**, is Senior Director for Research and Initiatives with the Association for Institutional Research (AIR). She leads AIR's national research, scholarship, and innovation agenda to effectively position IR and related fields within the changing landscape of higher education. Leah collaborates with stakeholders to create forward-looking models to advance evidenced-based decision making, and to equip higher education professionals with the knowledge and tools they need as leaders within their organizations. Prior to AIR, she worked in consulting, scholarly publications, association management, and college admissions. Leah holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership from Iowa State University, M.S. in Higher Education Administration from Florida State University, and A.B. in English from Mount Holyoke College.

**Javarro Russell, Ph.D.**, is a Senior Assessment Strategist in the Global Education Division at Educational Testing Service. Javarro obtained his doctorate in Assessment and Measurement from James Madison University. He has a background in consulting on measurement and assessment design issues in higher education. In his current role, he assists institutions in identifying solutions to assessing and measuring student learning outcomes on their campuses. He focuses on responding to critical questions about student learning for programs in general education and academic affairs, as well as student life. Javarro also specializes in identifying effective ways of reporting assessment results to audiences with varying levels of expertise in assessment and measurement. He is also the current President of the Northeastern Educational Research Association.

**Jennifer Wells, Ph.D.**, is the Director of Assessment in the Office of Institutional Effectiveness, and an Assistant Professor of Higher Education in First-Year and Transition Studies, both at Kennesaw State University. Dr. Wells is the Editor for the Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS), and she is facilitating the upcoming release of the 10th edition CAS book and Self-Assessment Guides (SAGs). Dr. Wells was

previously the Director of Planning and Assessment in Student Affairs at Kennesaw State University. Jen earned her Ph.D. in College Student Affairs Administration from the University of Georgia; a Master's in Student Affairs Administration from Michigan State, and undergraduate degrees in German and History from Albion College. She served on the faculty for the ACPA Assessment Institute from 2012–2016 and has presented numerous times on various assessment topics including data hoarding, program review, qualitative data analysis, focus groups and interviews, and continuous improvement. Her research interests include psychosocial development and the broader autism phenotype, video games and social interactions, assessment, and continuous improvement.

**Kimberly Yousey-Elsener, Ph.D.**, is the Director of Student Affairs Assessment and Strategic Initiatives at Binghamton University. Her experience in higher education includes coordinating student affairs and academic affairs assessment, teaching at the undergraduate and graduate level, residence life, academic advising/support, service learning, and student activities. She received her Ph.D. in Higher Education Administration and Policy from New York University. Her research interests include cultures of assessment and inquiry, capacity building in assessment, accreditation, and retention. Her publications focus on student affairs assessment.

### **About the Graduate Student Reviewers**

**Terell Bennett** is a graduate student in Higher Education Counseling and Student Affairs at West Chester University. Terell's current graduate assistantship and internship experience is in West Chester University Residence Life and Housing Services. His future goals are to work in Student Affairs as Vice President/President of Student Affairs or potentially higher executive leadership positions at an institution, which includes potentially being a president of an institution.

**Christopher G. Stancil** is a graduate student in the Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs Program at West Chester University. His current Assistantship is in the Achieve! Program and Early Alert Program. His short-term goal is to conduct research within the Dean's office (CAH), present it, and possibly get research published, and his long-term goal is to be a Dean.

**Lori Nicole Winters** is a graduate student in the Higher Education Policy and Student Affairs Program at West Chester University. Her current assistantship/internship is as an Assessment and Planning Graduate Assistant; and Office of Sustainability Intern. Her future goal upon graduation is to find an opportunity within sustainability program management.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book would not have been possible without the contribution of so many thoughtful writers and reviewers. We assembled, what we believe, is the A-team of AER, and we are so thankful for their contributions. This talented group of authors includes:

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Martha Glass, Ph.D.  
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Lisa J. Hatfield, Ed.D.

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We offer a special thanks to Dennis Kouba for his excellent editorial skills and valuable feedback. You helped us bring this book to completion.

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

I thank the creator of all things for the gifts that have been provided to all as we embarked upon this incredible journey. I want to also thank my wife and children for their support while I borrowed time from the family to complete this project. Last but not least, thank you Vic, my dear friend, respected colleague, and coeditor. You are amazing and as you know, this wouldn't have been possible without you.—Zeb

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**



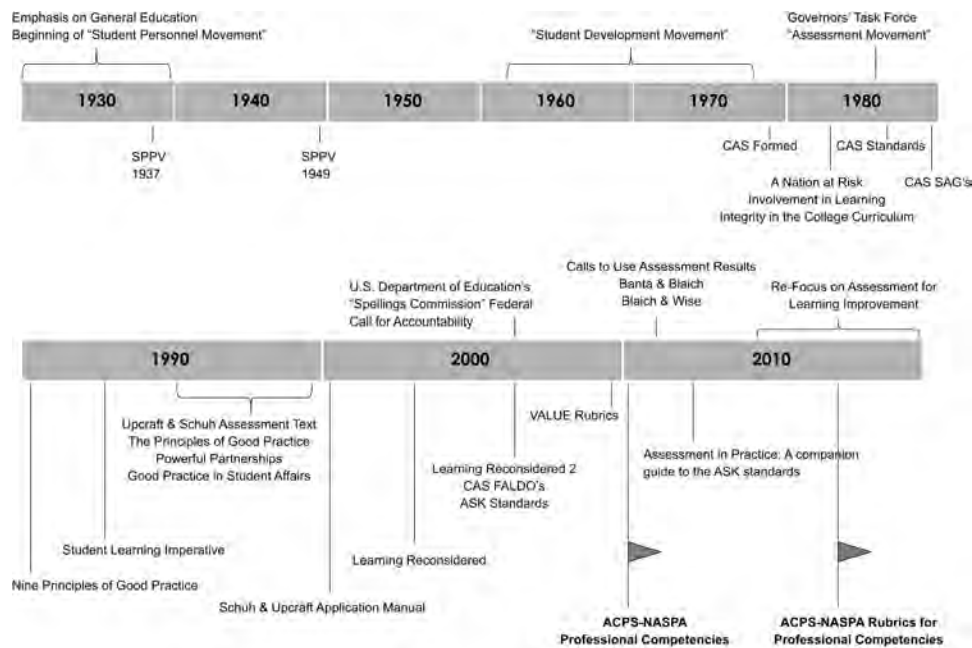


## Chapter 1

### 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.



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.

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