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At Cross Purposes: Faculty Perceptions Of Outcomes Assessment and Program Change

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Abstract

Given the heavy accountability mandates that have permeated K-16 education in recent years, many higher education faculty and administrators have experienced pressure to establish measurable student learning outcomes and then produce data that demonstrate student mastery of the stated learning objectives. A quantitative approach was applied to gather, analyze, and report data for this study. The participants were delimited to faculty at both public and private universities in Texas who teach in undergraduate teacher preparation programs. A multiple-choice questionnaire was used to collect three forms of data from the participants: (1) basic demographic information, (2) individual views regarding the value of outcomes assessment, and (3) personal outcomes assessment practices. After all data were collected, four MANOVAs were conducted to analyze the data. Additionally, descriptive statistics were run to provide further data regarding faculty outcomes assessment practices.

An emphasis on higher education program assessment has intensified steadily over the past 25 years. As many prominent assessment experts have acknowledged, both extrinsic accountability demands and intrinsic desires for program improvement have contributed to a dramatic increase in the forms and frequencies of program assessment at the collegiate level (Angelo & Cross, 1993; Banta, 2002; Coates & Seifert, 2011; Ewell, 2009; Huba & Freed, 1999; Maki, 2010; Palomba & Banta, 1999; Terenzini, 1989). Though a proliferation of program assessment measures has occurred, an appreciation for the value of outcomes assessment by all higher education stakeholders remains elusive.

A study of accountability measures could begin as far back as the days of Martin Luther as he worked to fight against the entrenched academic and religious teachings of his time (Marchand & Stoner, 2012). Additionally, accountability was linked closely with college

rankings in the early years of the 20th century (Shin, 2010). Then, toward the end of the 1900s, higher education institutions experienced greater pressure to demonstrate their effectiveness via a wider spectrum of indicators: graduation rates, financial stability, student accessibility, and program assessment (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011). One of the most impactful events in recent higher education history was the U. S. Department of Education's 2006 Commission on the Future of Higher Education, which called for an increase in accountability and greater transparency from colleges and universities. As higher education personnel look to the years ahead, it seems only probable that the need for colleges to prove their effectiveness will be even greater.

As college and university faculty have attempted to respond to the regulations of accountability agents such as the regional accrediting associations, the need for tangible proof of institutional effectiveness has been underscored (Conner & Rabovsky, 2011). Very often, the vehicle for demonstrating academic program effectiveness takes the form of program assessments. Though few educators would dispute the value of outcomes assessment for the purpose of gathering data regarding student attainment, the overwhelming push for assessment as a means of satisfying external governing bodies has resulted in a dimmed estimation of assessment's worth (Nelson, 2007).

At the beginning of the present century, Heller (2001) offered that three large hurdles must be overcome for progress to be made in higher education: access, affordability, and accountability. Certainly, all three of these issues remain of high concern for college administrators and faculty. Of the current matters facing higher education personnel, accountability and program assessment have evoked some of the greatest concern from faculty and merits a more in-depth examination (Angelo, 1999).

Statement of the Problem

Based upon the increase of accountability demands by accrediting agencies and governing bodies, it seems that higher education faculty and staff are experiencing greater pressure to prove their value now more than at any other time in American history (Ewell, 2009). The 2006 Commission on the Future of Higher Education has encouraged colleges and universities to take an introspective examination of their policies, financial services, and learning outcomes (USDE, 2006). Specifically, a focus on program assessment has resulted from accreditors' requests for proof of institutional effectiveness (Angelo, 1999; Banta, 1999). With accountability demands on the rise, faculty may sometimes struggle to view program assessment as a means of improving their curricular and instructional offerings; therefore, many faculty perceive outcomes assessment as an unnecessary burden rather than an outlet for program improvement (Coates & Seifert, 2011; Dano & Stensaker, 2007). The problem of this study was an examination of faculty perceptions of outcomes assessment on program change.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the differences that exist in the responses of faculty concerning the value that they place on the role of outcomes assessment in the program planning process. In addition, the study sought to explore the differences that exist across all

faculty response variables. The specific focus of this study was the assessment views of undergraduate faculty in teacher preparation programs. Questionnaire items garnered information from faculty regarding their assessment and planning practices. As well, survey questions collected data about the general attitudes of faculty regarding the effectiveness of program assessment on the higher education level.

Faculty play a major role in the outcomes assessment efforts of academic programs. Developing a better understanding of faculty views of assessment as they relate to program planning provides administrators greater insight into faculty needs. In addition, this study's results provide data regarding the frequency and forms of assessment that occur in many undergraduate educator preparation programs. Though the data were gathered from educator preparation program faculty in Texas, analysis efforts sought to generalize findings to programs in other academic fields.

Significance of the Study

In the current age of accountability and evaluation, a thorough understanding of how assessment impacts student learning is not only beneficial for higher education faculty but also necessary. Knowledge of the varied forms of program assessment helps faculty collect data in the most efficient and effective manners. Likewise, a grasp on the assessment process allows faculty to make changes that move programs forward.

Central to a faculty member's belief in the value of assessment is his or her foundational comprehension of the basic purposes for assessment. Stiggins (2007) suggested that three main purposes for assessment exist: assessment *of* learning, assessment *for* learning, and assessment *as* learning (p. 18). An assessment *of* learning typically occurs after all learning and instruction have occurred. National and state certification exams represent common examples of assessment *of* learning. When assessing *for* learning, faculty have the opportunity to alter program curriculum and practices to allow for the specific needs of each student to be met. Assessment *as* learning magnifies the roles of students in the learning process. As such, students are able to monitor their own understanding of program competencies and seek additional support where it is needed.

Related to these three purposes are two key assessment-related terms: formative and summative evaluations. Since the 1960s, concern for the implementation of both summative and formative evaluation methods on the higher education level has steadily grown (Beer & Bloomer, 1986; Bryson & Cullen, 1984; Scriven, 1996; Taras, 2005; Yorke, 2003). In short, assessments are formative when they occur during a period of instruction and provide valuable feedback to the student and the instructor regarding the student's program outcomes progress. Conversely, summative assessments occur at the end of a period of instruction and signify a program's level of effectiveness. Both formative and summative evaluations are valuable when assessment data are used as vehicles for continuous program improvement.

Since the rise of accountability standards in the 1980s, institutions of higher learning have added an array of evaluation practices to their arsenal of outcomes assessment methods. One of the common forms of program assessment embedded within curriculum is the student portfolio (Fisher, 1993; Lam & Campbell, 2003). Capstone experiences and internships are also used as a means of assessing a student's mastery of program outcomes (Black & Hundley, 2004; Murray, Perez, & Guimaraes, 2008; Palomba & Banta, 1999). For programs with certifications and professional licensures, standardized assessment data are often considered in the program

improvement process (Arter & McTighe, 2001; Huba & Freed, 1999). Though viewed by external accrediting bodies as weaker forms of assessment, student satisfaction surveys and questionnaires are sources of assessment data that faculty can use to determine outcomes assessment progress (Cranton & Legge, 1978; Price & Randall, 2008). Moreover, qualitative program evaluations can also be conducted to provide feedback to faculty and administrators (Patton, 1987).

The accountability-improvement dichotomy related to outcomes assessment plays a role in the research surrounding the way faculty view assessment and program improvement. As Ewell (2009) noted, program assessment has evolved in four key ways over time: (a) faculty now see assessment as important and necessary, (b) a general assessment shift in higher education policy has occurred, (c) the power of accrediting agencies has dramatically increased in recent years, and (d) advancements in technology have significantly improved the assessment process (p. 6-7). A key theme that emerged from Ewell's work was that a definite motivational difference exists between accountability-driven and improvement-driven outcomes assessment. Assessment for accountability's sake refers to the external desire to meet the requirements of outside agencies (Kallison & Cohen, 2010; Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). On the other hand, assessment for improvement's sake results in student and faculty self-evaluation and self-reflection (James & Ervin, 2006; Nelson, 2007).

Significant information exists in regard to the principles that characterize sound assessment practices (Angelo, 2002; Banta, 1997; Huba & Freed, 1999). According to Banta (2002), quality program assessment should start with an introspective look at programmatic and institutional values. Similarly, Freed, Klugman, and Fife (1997) and Hall and Hord (2001) noted that during the change stage of the improvement process, faculty must begin with thoughtful consideration of the institution's mission statement and core values. From here, program faculty should collaborate to create assessments, collect and analyze data, and implement program improvements (Welsh & Metcalf, 2003). From evidence in the literature, the final stage of implementing program improvements-regularly described as "closing the loop" should be the eventual goal of faculty and administrators (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Pieper, Fulcher, Sundre, & Erwin, 2008; Seybert, 2002).

A review of the literature surrounding faculty perceptions of accountability, program improvement, and the value of outcomes assessment yields an array of important and meaningful findings. In most cases, researchers have examined each of these areas separately and have not sought to identify the various differences that exist in the manner in which faculty view assessment and their efforts at program improvement. Accordingly, this study attempted to help bridge the gap between what is already understood regarding assessment and improvement practices and what factors impact faculty perceptions of the value of program assessment. An end product of the new research was aimed at helping administrators be better equipped to identify the needs of their faculty. As well, the study endeavored to help faculty better self-assess their own perceptions regarding the importance of assessment in the program improvement process.

Research Questions

The following research questions provided focus and direction for this study:

1. What are the responses of undergraduate education faculty concerning the value of outcomes assessment in the program planning process?
2. Do differences exist in the responses of undergraduate education faculty concerning the value of outcomes assessment in the program planning process?
3. What are the practices of undergraduate education faculty related to outcomes assessment?

Hypotheses

This study examined the following null and alternate research hypotheses. A confidence level of $p < 0.05$ was used for all statistical analyses. The following two hypotheses guided the course of this study:

1. H_O: No differences exist in the responses of undergraduate education faculty concerning the value of outcomes assessment in the program planning process.
2. H_A: Differences exist in the responses of undergraduate education faculty concerning the value of outcomes assessment in the program planning process.

Method of Procedure

In accordance with a key purpose of quantitative research, this study sought "to discover something about a large group of individuals by studying a much smaller group" (Gall, Gall, & Borg, 2003, p. 167). Data were collected from participants using a 14-item survey tool. According to Coughlan, Cronin, and Ryan (2007), surveys and questionnaires "are the most commonly used data gathering instruments and consist mainly of closed questions with a choice of fixed answers" (p. 661). To collect research data, a survey link was distributed to all participants via a secure SurveyMonkey account. Study participants marked their responses and submitted their surveys electronically. A 2-week data collection window existed during which educator preparation faculty responded to the survey. At the close of the 2-week period, all data were downloaded and stored on a password-protected computer for further security of all participant responses. After all data were collected, a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was performed to determine differences in faculty responses. The independent variables included the gender, age, ethnicity, and types of institutions in which faculty participants teach. The dependent variables were the level of agreement that faculty reflected regarding their outcomes assessment practices and perceptions. Additionally, descriptive statistics were run to examine the frequency and percentage of responses that were provided for each question pertaining to faculty assessment practices. Moreover, standard deviations and means were calculated regarding faculty perceptions of outcomes assessment.

Limitations

The following limitations were used for the study:

1. Faculty perceptions of outcomes assessment were limited by the varying degrees of involvement that each participant experienced with program-level outcomes assessment.
2. The size of the pool of participants was limited by the number of faculty who chose to participate in the electronic survey.

Delimitations

The following delimitation was used for the study:

1. Participants for this study were delimited to faculty from Texas 4-year degree granting institutions.
2. Participants were also currently teaching a minimum of one course in a teacher preparation program at the undergraduate level.
3. Generalizations from the research were only applied to institutions that were similar in scope and mission.

Research Question 1

The first research question determined the responses of undergraduate education faculty concerning the value of outcomes assessment in the program planning process.

The following six statements were posed to the study participants: (a) I consider outcomes assessment to be a valuable component of the program improvement process; (b) My department (as a whole) uses outcomes assessment data to guide the majority of our program changes; (c) I would participate in outcomes assessment even if I was not required to do so by my college/university; (d) I use outcomes assessment data to guide the majority of the course changes for courses that I teach; (e) I think that my program director views outcomes assessment as an important component of program planning; (f) I feel knowledgeable in the process of creating and assessing program-related outcomes. These statements are summarized in the left-hand column of Table 1.

Participants selected a choice based upon their levels of agreement with each statement. Agreement levels included strongly disagree, disagree, neutral, agree, or strongly agree. A choice marked *strongly disagree* received a score of *one*. Conversely, *strongly agree* received a score of *five*. A total of 80 participants responded to the outcomes assessment survey. A summarized view of the means and standard deviations across each of the four independent variables is represented in Table 1.

Table 1

Overall Means and Standard Deviations by Value Statements

	Type of Inst. (*n*=80)		Gender (*n*=80)		Age Range (*n*=80)		Ethnicity (*n*=80)	
Statement	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Valuable for Program Improvement	4.21	0.774	4.21	0.774	4.21	0.774	4.22	0.779
Data Guides Program Changes	3.93	0.808	3.93	0.808	3.93	0.808	3.91	0.804
Assessment Conducted Willingly	3.86	0.882	3.86	0.882	3.86	0.882	3.86	0.888
Data Guides Course Changes	3.75	0.864	3.75	0.864	3.75	0.864	3.75	0.869
Program Director Views	4.07	0.792	4.07	0.792	4.07	0.792	4.06	0.790
Knowledge of Outcomes Assessment	3.95	0.913	3.95	0.913	3.95	0.913	3.95	0.918

The mean response indicated that faculty members possess a moderate to high level of agreement related to the value of outcomes assessment and the program improvement process.

Research Question 2

The second research question focused intensely on the value statements of each of the demographic groups in relation to the six statements posed to the study participants in research question one. These statements are summarized in the left-hand columns of each of the tables in this section.

Four multivariate analyses of variance (MANOVAs) were conducted on the data gathered from the survey responses. Overall, the MANOVAs found no multivariate significant difference in how educator preparation program faculty value outcomes assessment. However, for both the *gender* and *age range* independent variables, one question indicated significant between-subject differences. Each of the four subsections that follow outlines the means and standard deviations of the four independent variables: (a) type of institution, (b) gender, (c) age range, and (d) ethnicity. Where applicable, the significant between-subject differences are further explained.

Two types of educator preparation institutions were included in this research study: *public* and *private*. Faculty from 39 private colleges and universities responded for a total of 80 responses. In all, faculty from 41 public institutions responded to the survey. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the data gathered from the survey responses. Overall, the MANOVA found no multivariate significant difference in the responses provided to each of the six value statements [$\lambda = .954$, $F\ (6, 73) = .590$, $p = .737$, $\eta^2 = .046$]. Additionally, no between-group differences were identified in the MANOVA conducted for public and private institutions. The means and standard deviations are outlined in the Table 2.

Table 2

Means and Standard Deviations for Value Statements by Type of Institution

	Public (*n*=41)		Private *(n*=39)	
Statement	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Valuable for Program Improvement	4.07	0.905	4.36	0.584
Data Guides Program Changes	3.90	0.768	3.95	0.857
Assessment Conducted Willingly	3.73	0.949	4.00	0.795
Data Guides Course Changes	3.61	0.919	3.90	0.788
Program Director Views	4.02	0.880	4.13	0.695
Knowledge of Outcomes Assessment	3.90	0.944	4.00	0.889

Additionally, no between-group differences were identified in the MANOVA conducted for public and private institutions. Between-subjects effects can be found in Table 3.

Table 3

Between-Subjects Effects for Value Statements by Institution Type

Source	SS	df	MS	F	*p*	η^2
Valuable for Program Improvement	1.633	1	1.633	2.783	0.099	0.034
Data Guides Program Changes	0.043	1	0.043	0.065	0.800	0.001
Assessment Conducted Willingly	1.439	1	1.439	1.869	0.176	0.023
Data Guides Course Changes	1.654	1	1.654	2.250	0.138	0.028
Program Director Views	0.215	1	0.215	0.341	0.561	0.004
Knowledge of Outcomes Assessment	0.190	1	0.190	0.226	0.636	0.003

In addition to information related to public and private institutions, data were collected from survey participants regarding gender. A total of 80 responses were collected. Of these responses, 21 were male and 59 were female. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the data gathered from the survey responses. Overall, the MANOVA found no multivariate significant difference [$\lambda = .915$, F (6, 73) = 1.126, $p = .356$, $\eta^2 = .085$]. The results can be found in Table 4.

Table 4

Means and Standard Deviations for Value Statements by Gender

	Male (*n*=21)		Female (*n*=59)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Valuable for Program Improvement	3.95	1.071	4.31	0.623
Data Guides Program Changes	3.81	0.814	3.97	0.809
Assessment Conducted Willingly	3.62	1.161	3.95	0.753
Data Guides Course Changes	3.48	1.078	3.85	0.761
Program Director Views	3.76	0.944	4.19	0.706
Knowledge of Outcomes Assessment	3.71	1.056	4.03	0.850

However, a between-group difference was identified in the MANOVA for the fifth value statement. Despite the significant difference, no post hoc test was completed for gender because the SPSS descriptive data clearly reflected a higher mean score for females (see Table 5).

Table 5

Between-Subjects Effects for Value Statements by Gender

Source	SS	df	MS	F	*p*	η^2
Valuable for Program Improvement	1.927	1	1.927	3.306	0.073	0.041
Data Guides Program Changes	0.380	1	0.380	0.579	0.449	0.007
Assessment Conducted Willingly	1.688	1	1.688	2.201	0.142	0.027
Data Guides Course Changes	2.135	1	2.135	2.928	0.091	0.036
Program Director Views	2.791	1	2.791	4.656	0.034	0.056
Knowledge of Outcomes Assessment	1.582	1	1.582	1.922	0.170	0.024

A third form of demographic data that was considered was faculty age ranges (see Table 6). In total, five age ranges were developed. Nine survey responses marked the 25-35 age range. The 36-45 age range received 18 responses. For the 46-55 age range, 15 responses were recorded. The highest response category was the 56-65 age range, which included 28 participants. The final age range category was 66 and older, which yielded 10 responses. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the data gathered from the survey responses. Overall, the MANOVA found no multivariate significant difference [$\lambda = .667$, $F\ (24, 245.411) = 1.257$, $p = .195$, $\eta^2 = .096$].

Table 6

Means and Standard Deviations for Value Statements by Age Range

	Ages 25-35 (*n*=9)		Ages 36-45 (*n*=18)		Ages 46-55 (*n*=15)		Ages 56-65 (*n*=28)		Ages 66+ (*n*=10)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Valuable for Program Improvement	4.11	0.601	4.00	0.767	4.20	1.207	4.36	0.559	4.21	0.675
Data Guides Program Changes	3.22	0.972	3.61	0.778	4.47	0.516	3.96	0.744	4.20	0.632
Assessment Conducted Willingly	3.56	1.014	3.67	0.970	3.93	1.100	4.00	0.667	4.00	0.816
Data Guides Course Changes	3.22	0.833	3.56	0.856	3.93	1.100	3.89	0.737	3.90	0.738
Program Director Views	3.67	0.500	3.83	0.857	4.27	1.100	4.18	0.670	4.30	0.483
Knowledge of Outcomes Assessment	3.67	0.866	4.00	1.029	3.80	0.862	4.11	0.786	3.90	1.197

Though no overall multivariate significant difference was found, a between-group difference was identified in the MANOVA for the second value statement. To further explore the difference, a Tukey Honestly Significant Difference post hoc test was completed. This test indicated that the significance was greater than a .05, therefore achieving homogeneity of variance. Three differences were found among the age ranges (see Table 7). Faculty in the 25-35 age range proved to be significantly different from participants in the 46-55 (p = .001) and 66 and older (p = .037) age ranges. Also, participants between the ages of 36 and 45 responded significantly different from those in the 46-55 age range (p = .011).

Table 7

Between-Subjects Effects for Value Statements by Age Range

Source	SS	df	MS	F	*p*	η^2
Valuable for Program Improvement	01.570	4	0.393	0.643	0.634	0.033
Data Guides Program Changes	11.419	4	2.855	5.335	0.001	0.222
Assessment Conducted Willingly	02.332	4	0.583	0.739	0.568	0.038
Data Guides Course Changes	04.488	4	1.122	1.544	0.198	0.076
Program Director Views	03.910	4	0.977	1.606	0.182	0.079
Knowledge of Outcomes Assessment	01.821	4	0.455	0.534	0.711	0.028

The fourth source of demographic data considered for this study was ethnicity. Participants were yielded the option of selecting the ethnicity that best represented them among the following choices: *African American*, *Caucasian/White*, *Hispanic*, *Native American*, *multiracial*, *Pacific Islander*, or *other*. In total, 80 responses were provided for this question. Of those respondents, 75 marked *White*, four marked *Hispanic*, and one marked *Pacific Islander*. Accordingly, the lack of equal representation among ethnic groups limits the generalizability of the results. A multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was conducted on the data gathered from the survey responses. Overall, the MANOVA found no multivariate significant difference in the responses provided to each of the six value statements [$\lambda = .976$, $F\ (6, 72) = .295$, $p = .938$, $\eta^2 = .024$]. The means and standard deviations for the participants who marked *White* or *Hispanic* are found in Table 8.

Table 8

Means and Standard Deviations for Value Statements by Ethnicity

	White (*n*=75)		Hispanic (*n*=4)	
	M	*SD*	*M*	*SD*
Valuable for Program Improvement	4.20	0.788	4.50	0.577
Data Guides Program Changes	3.89	0.815	4.25	0.500
Assessment Conducted Willingly	3.84	0.901	4.25	0.500
Data Guides Course Changes	3.72	0.879	4.25	0.500
Program Director Views	4.05	0.804	4.25	0.500
Knowledge of Outcomes Assessment	3.95	0.928	4.00	0.816

Additionally, no between-group differences were identified in the MANOVA conducted for the *White* and *Hispanic* ethnicities. Results of the between-subjects effects are presented in Table 9.

Table 9

Between-Subjects Effects for Value Statements by Ethnicity

Source	SS	df	MS	F	*p*	η^2
Valuable for Program Improvement	0.342	1	0.342	0.560	0.457	0.007
Data Guides Program Changes	0.483	1	0.483	0.745	0.391	0.010
Assessment Conducted Willingly	0.638	1	0.638	0.808	0.372	0.010
Data Guides Course Changes	1.067	1	1.067	1.419	0.237	0.018
Program Director Views	0.147	1	0.147	0.233	0.631	0.003
Knowledge of Outcomes Assessment	0.011	1	0.011	0.013	0.911	0.000

Research Question 3

The final research question centered on the practices of educator preparation faculty in regard to outcomes assessment. To gather data in reference to faculty practices, participants were asked to respond to four questions/statements: (a) With what frequency does your department participate in discussions of programmatic outcomes assessment? (b) Which statement best describes your view of outcomes assessment? (c) Indicate the number of changes that have been made over the past year to the program in which you teach as a result of outcomes assessment data analysis, and (d) Indicate which of the following forms of outcomes assessment are incorporated in the program in which you teach. The average number of respondents for each question was 78.

Participants were first asked to reflect upon the frequency in which they engaged in outcomes assessment as a whole department. A total of 78 faculty responded to this question. Choices included: (a) once each week, (b) once every 2 weeks, (c) once each month, (d) once or twice each semester, (e) once each year, and (f) once every 2-5 years. The vast majority of faculty participants indicated that they engaged in outcomes assessment activities once or twice each semester. A detailed examination of the frequencies and percentages of each question option is provided in Table 10.

Table 10

Percentages and Frequencies of Departmental Participation in Outcomes Assessment

Survey Response	Frequency	Percentage
Once each week	1	01.3
Once every 2 weeks	6	07.6
Once each month	15	19.0
Once or twice each semester	44	55.7
Once each year	10	12.7
Once every 2-5 years	2	02.5

In addition to indicating how often they participate in outcomes assessment, faculty members were questioned regarding their perceived value of program assessment. Survey respondents were asked to choose the statement that best represents their attitudes toward outcomes assessment. Statement options included: (a) Outcomes assessment is often not a true reflection of program effectiveness; therefore, assessment should not carry much weight in the program planning process; (b) Outcomes assessment is a very valuable component of student learning and should be a leading force in the program planning process; and (c) I see value in collecting and analyzing outcomes assessment data; however, these are not activities on which my department generally focuses. Each of these statements is reflected, respectively, in summary form as *not valuable*, *very valuable*, and *somewhat valuable* in Table 11. A total of 77 responses

were recorded for this question. A clear majority of educator preparation faculty demonstrated that outcomes assessment was a very valuable component of student learning and should be a leading force in the program planning process.

Table 11

Percentages and Frequencies of Faculty Views of Outcomes Assessment

Survey Response	Frequency	Percentage
Not Valuable	9	11.4
Very Valuable	50	63.3
Somewhat Valuable	18	22.8

A review of outcomes assessment literature often includes the phrase *closing the loop* in regard to the practice of implementing program changes as a result of findings from outcomes assessment data (Palomba & Banta, 1999; Pieper et al., 2008; Seybert, 2002). To gather data for this study on this topic, participants were asked to indicate the average amount of program changes that were made over the past academic year as a result of their analysis of assessment data. Options included: (a) no program changes made, (b) 1-2 program changes made, (c) 3-5 program changes made, (d) 6-10 program changes made, and (e) 11 or more program changes made. In all, 78 educator preparation program faculty responded to this question. The data recorded for each program change option is reflected in Table 12.

Table 12

Percentages and Frequencies of Assessment-Related Program Changes

Survey Response	Frequency	Percentage
0 program changes made	5	06.3
1-2 program changes made	25	31.6
3-5 program changes made	28	35.4
6-10 program changes made	13	16.5
11 or more program changes made	7	08.9

A final survey question invited participants to select one or more of the listed assessment tools that they regularly include in their program assessment practices. Six choices were provided for selection: (a) portfolios, (b) exams, (c) written compositions/research papers, (d) internships/field experiences, (e) capstone projects, and (f) embedded questions. In all, 78 survey participants responded to this question. A great majority of faculty indicated that exams (87.5%) and internships/field experiences (87.3%) were often incorporated into their program assessment efforts. More specific information pertaining to this survey item is displayed in Table 13.

Table 13

Percentages and Frequencies of Incorporated Forms of Program Assessment

Survey Response	Frequency	Percentage
Portfolios	45	57.0
Exams	66	83.5
Written Compositions / Research Papers	58	73.4
Internships / Field Experiences	69	87.3
Capstone Projects	52	65.8
Embedded Questions	24	30.4

Summary of Findings

In all, 80 participants responded to the online survey that was used to gather data about faculty assessment practices and perceptions. Regarding the first research question, participants were asked to select the choices that reflect their levels of agreement with six outcomes assessment value statements. For each question, the mean response indicated that faculty members possess a moderate to high level of agreement related to the value of outcomes assessment and the program improvement process.

The second research question produced data concerning the relationship between faculty demographics and their perceived value of outcomes assessment. Specifically, gender, ethnicity, and age were examined. The fourth demographic area involved the type of institution-public or private-in which the faculty participants taught. In each multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA), the data revealed no significant difference between faculty demographics and assessment value perceptions. However, two between-group differences were identified for the age range demographic.

The final research question pertained to the practices of educator preparation faculty as they relate to outcomes assessment. The term *practices* included the frequency in which outcomes assessment decisions were made as well as the forms of outcomes assessment that were regularly incorporated into the teaching-learning process. Over half of the participants indicated that they participate in outcomes assessment discussions on the program level once or twice each semester. Similarly, half of the faculty surveyed said that they view outcomes assessment as a very valuable ingredient in program improvement endeavors. Internships and field experiences were marked as the most common forms of outcomes assessment in educator preparation programs. Exams were also listed by the majority of participants as a regular tool for program assessment. Of the choices provided, embedded questions received the fewest number of responses.

The data gathered in this research study upheld the null hypothesis, which stated that no differences exist in the responses of undergraduate education faculty concerning the value of outcomes assessment in the program planning process.

Implications for Practice

No overarching significant differences were detected among the four demographics represented in this study. An educator preparation program faculty member's gender, when compared to his or her ethnicity, reflected no significant difference in how he or she perceived the role of assessment in the program improvement process. Likewise, when comparing a college or university instructor's age range to the type of institution in which he or she teaches, no significant difference was indicated by the data. Only minimal between-group demographics indicated any significant differences in faculty responses.

Despite these findings, the collection of outcomes assessment studies that comprised the literature review has provided a sound synthesis of important assessment research. For example, the definitions and characteristics given for outcomes assessment by Angelo and Cross (1993), Huba and Freed (1999), and Allen (2003) provided a foundation for additional research into the assessment field. Correspondingly, the insight into program improvement and the change process yielded from the work of Hines (1991), Drucker (2008), and Fugazzotto (2009) added to the framework of this study. The data resulting from the faculty survey have served as a valuable extension of the previous body of higher education assessment and program improvement knowledge. Also, on a smaller scale, the faculty and educator preparation program leaders who participated in the study were supplied an opportunity for personal reflection into their current practices and program assessment views. As well, non-participants who teach on the higher education level may use this data as a measuring stick when considering their own perceptions of the value of outcomes assessment.

Recommendations for Further Research

As higher education faculty continue working to prepare students to be successful in this present global society, many opportunities for further research into the field of outcomes assessment exist. This study examined four key demographics and the differences that existed within and among each independent variable. Future studies may expand the variables to include an examination of the perceptions of faculty at for-profit versus not-for-profit universities. In addition, whereas this study's sample was taken from faculty who teach in educator preparation programs, researchers may seek to investigate the practices of faculty who teach in other disciplines to develop a broader understanding of the views of higher education faculty. Following a similar study structure, future research may also consider expanding the study to include more states or regions of the United States.

Another consideration for future studies is that researchers incorporate qualitative components to the data collection efforts. The present study provided a substantive framework for the assimilation of faculty assessment views and practices. The three sections in the survey helped organize the facilitation of data collection. As well, the online platform of the survey allowed for ease in data submission and analysis. Nevertheless, altering the present study to include open-ended response items may provide even further awareness of outcomes assessment and program change.

This study was concentrated specifically on the higher education level. However, future studies may consider examining the perceptions of elementary and secondary faculty in relation

to assessment practices and perceptions. Given the intense pressure that has long-existed in many K-12 schools for higher tests scores and improved student performance, a research study targeting this level of education may yield many important and interesting findings. Moreover, unlike the findings from this study, an array of significant differences may be discovered in the views of elementary and secondary faculty.

A final recommendation is that researchers examine how faculty and program practices change over time as a result of their varying perceptions of assessment. This study gathered information regarding the forms of assessment that often take place in colleges and universities. It also inquired into the frequency in which assessment typically occurs in a given program. However, future studies may observe the correlation that exists between the level of time and energy exerted for assessment and the degree of attainment of program outcomes.

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