

A COMPARISON OF THE BELIEFS OF STATE LEGISLATORS AND  
COMMUNITY COLLEGE ASSESSMENT PRACTITIONERS  
TOWARD IMPLEMENTATION OF MANDATED STUDENT OUTCOMES ASSESSMENT  
GUIDELINES IN THE COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA

BY

MARK QUENTIN EMICK SR.

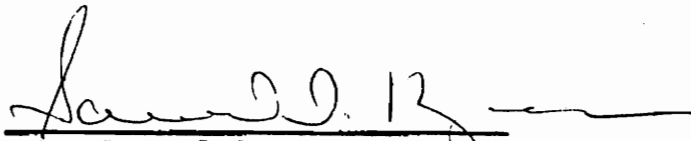
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**(ABSTRACT)**

Virginia's mandated student outcomes assessment program, as created by Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 in 1986, allowed community colleges in the Commonwealth latitude in developing their own assessment strategies. These strategies have developed slowly and with some inconsistency.

The purpose of this study is to determine the congruency of beliefs about the implementation of Virginia's student outcomes assessment program between purposefully selected members of the Virginia General Assembly and community college assessment practitioners.

Data for this study were derived from the review of public documents, and the execution of a survey instrument, the results of which were used to develop interviews with designated state legislators and community college assessment practitioners. The interviews became the primary data source for the study.

Findings indicate that the legislative participants believe that the development of a common assessment strategy

used by all community colleges across Virginia would be more appropriate than approaches specifically geared to individual institutional missions. Practitioner respondents differ on this issue. The legislators generally believe that the use of a standardized testing approach administered across all community colleges could be beneficial. The practitioners beliefs differ, though not markedly, from the legislative group.

Legislators are evenly divided on the issue of using assessment results for institutional comparison. The practitioner group express reservations concerning this prospect. There exists modest differences of belief between the groups concerning the appropriation of general funds to support individual community colleges based on assessment results.

The study findings point to congruence of belief among legislative and practitioner respondents when considering the implementation of outcomes assessment in the area of general education. Agreement of beliefs is also found among the practitioner and legislative groups in the implementation of assessment guidelines affecting the communication of assessment results with the citizenry, accountability issues relating to discontinuance of programs, quality assurance, etc., and the role of assessment in Virginia's college transfer processes.

**DEDICATION**

To Linda H. Emick

My wife whose appreciation for education, and family, and whose enduring patience remain important constants in my life.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

Virginia's colleges and universities have operated historically as basically autonomous entities, often immune from legislative intrusion and bureaucratic controls. Administrative procedures, student/faculty relationships, personnel matters, and academic policies have been essentially the domain of the local institution. However, in recent years public higher education institutions have become increasingly entangled in an environment where competition for scarce public and private resources is increasing. The business community and the public at large are questioning the value and utility of a college education. Demands by political constituencies for greater accountability are on the rise, and expanding competition among state agencies and programs for a greater slice of the budget "pie" has produced a reordering of funding priorities. It is not surprising, therefore, that during the decade of the 1980s the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), the Commonwealth's higher education coordinating agency; and key legislators, familiar with national and regional assessment trends, began making inquiry into Virginia's efforts at measuring and assessing student achievement (Ewell, 1993; Fuhrmann & Gentemann, 1993).

In 1985, the Virginia General Assembly directed SCHEV to conduct a study of approaches to measure student learning (Virginia General Assembly, 1985). The following year, using the SCHEV study as the core, Senate Joint Resolution 83 (1986) was passed, mandating "the establishment of programs to measure student achievement" (Virginia General Assembly, 1986b, p. 1). In 1987 The Virginia Plan for Higher Education, a biennial publication, and the document through which Virginia's colleges and universities are required to report various assessment activities and data, asserted that the public required additional evidence that important skills, abilities, and knowledge were being imparted to students as an indication of the return on the public investment in higher education (SCHEV, 1987b; Virginia General Assembly, 1986a).

Virginia's mandated assessment approach occurred at a time when "colleges and universities across America were being asked to document educational results . . . and to demonstrate educational effectiveness in greater detail than ever before" (Ewell and Lisensky, 1988, p. 7).

Various state assessment mandates, created during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s not only differ in content but also in terms of the distinctive political and economic context in which they evolved. For example, the Florida and New Jersey assessment mandates prescribe documentation of educational results through a "common testing" approach.

Tennessee's mandated approach to higher education assessment links specified performance criteria to increases in college and university base budgets (Ewell, 1985). Virginia legislators, while encouraging serious assessment of student achievement, stopped short of prescribing standardized testing or linking assessment results to budgetary considerations. In fact, SCHEV officials have indicated that the legislature sought little more than assurance that assessment efforts would be undertaken in good faith (Aper, 1989).

Currently, Virginia's colleges and universities are approaching the assessment of student achievement through a process that complies with general guidelines established by SCHEV. These guidelines were accepted by the 1986 General Assembly and served as the basis for Senate Joint Resolution 83, establishing mandated assessment of student achievement in Virginia (Virginia General Assembly, 1986b).

As the legislature, the citizenry, and higher education officials in Virginia become increasingly interested in the outcomes associated with students' college and university experience, the more important the "guidelines for measuring student achievement in Virginia," and their effect on assessing student achievement become (Virginia General Assembly, 1986a, p. 17). It is appropriate to investigate, from the perspectives of lawmakers and community college assessment practitioners, the implementation of these

guidelines and to analyze their effect on educational achievement in two-year public colleges in the Commonwealth.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The Virginia General Assembly established mandatory student outcomes assessment in 1986 with the passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 (Virginia General Assembly, 1986b). This law was predicated on the recommendations contained in Senate Document No. 14, which was written by the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia and entitled "The Measurement of Student Achievement and Assurance of Quality in Virginia Higher Education." This report, and the resulting law, contained key concepts around which Virginia's student outcomes assessment program would revolve (Virginia General Assembly, 1986a). Initially, the Commonwealth's mandated assessment program followed on the heels of a national pattern whereby most institutions of higher education had assessment programs tailored to their own distinctive needs, missions, and clientele (Ewell, 1991). Regional accrediting agencies, particularly the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, had developed assessment standards to be employed as a means of evaluating individual college and university effectiveness (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1992).

In Senate Document No. 14, recommendation No. 2 states that



programs and procedures to measure student achievement should be derived from institutional initiatives, recognizing the diversity of Virginia's public colleges and universities, the tradition of institutional autonomy, and the capacity of faculty and administrators to identify their own problems and solve them creatively (Virginia General Assembly, 1986a, p. 16).

Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 (1986) included this concept by legislating that "all colleges and universities should establish procedures and programs consistent with each institution's mission and educational objectives to measure student achievement" (Virginia General Assembly, 1986b, p. 1).

Another important concept upon which Virginia's assessment program was based was that the SCHEV report, as well as the legislation, decided against mandating comprehensive testing or linking assessment results to general fund appropriations. Instead, the Virginia legislation required that good assessment programs be developed by the colleges and universities, and "reports be made to the public as to the results of these institutional efforts to measure student achievement in its biennial revisions of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education" (Virginia General Assembly, 1986b, p. 1).

Even though the Virginia assessment program sought to preserve the diversity of the Commonwealth's system of higher education by allowing institutions to develop their own specific assessment strategies, the law provided for the

creation of guidelines "for designing good assessment programs, and to help institutions develop programs" (Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, 1986). These guidelines set the tone and direction of Virginia's student outcomes assessment program and were central to any consideration of its overall effectiveness. The determination of student attainment and the analysis of student progress in Virginia were tied to the way in which these guidelines were perceived by legislators and practitioners and the degree to which they have or have not been implemented at community colleges across the Commonwealth.

### Assumptions

The following assumptions provided a starting point for this study:

1. "Ownership" of the higher education assessment process rests with state policy officials, particularly the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia.

2. Assessment, as practiced in Virginia's community colleges, is a loosely defined data collection and routine reporting process.

3. As Virginia faces the prospect of greater financial austerity and the challenges of improving the state's economic climate, legislators are looking more critically at the variety and distribution of academic programs, at operational

costs, and at what constitutes instructional quality and institutional effectiveness.

4. Traditional notions of "arms-length" institutional autonomy are giving way to increased notions of accountability at the state level, taking the form of base budget incentives, special categorical initiatives, and "inter-college" grant competitions.

5. Legislators and state higher education officials are interested in institutional efforts to document the generally held belief that higher education is a good investment and produces a good product.

### **Delimitations**

The study was delimited to selected legislators having served and deliberated on legislative committees involved with higher education in the Commonwealth.

The study was delimited to assessment practitioners within the community college system of Virginia and did not involve four-year college or university interests.

The study was delimited to the implementation of assessment guidelines relating to community colleges as legislated in Senate Joint Resolution 83 (1986).

### Limitations

Because the research involved the use of purposefully selected informants in each sub-culture group, generalization can be used in formulating working hypotheses but not conclusions.

Potential bias is introduced in any study that uses impressions and recollections of interviewees as a major source of data. To reduce these sources of bias, audio taping of interviews, journal records of the researcher's impressions of interview situations, and the use of the same descriptive questions and probes to guide each interview across each sub-culture group for standardization was employed.

Since a single researcher collected and analyzed the data, there are no measures of inter-researcher reliability. To address this limitation all original data, as well as tape and transcription location, were maintained to make it possible for other researchers to examine the data for their own evaluation of the analysis and interpretations.

### Problem Statement

Virginia's mandated student outcomes assessment program, as created in 1986, was an extension of a decentralized philosophy that the state government traditionally has followed in its relationship with higher education institutions. The elements of the Commonwealth's student

outcomes assessment approach were developed in the broader context of access, teaching improvement, student progress, and remediation. This approach has allowed institutions considerable latitude in developing their own assessment process. So long as institutions demonstrated care for undergraduate improvement, and focused on the maintenance of access while improving the quality of student performance (Virginia General Assembly, 1986a), the state's intrusion would be limited to general planning and reporting oversight. Even though the state has chosen to limit direct involvement in prescribing expected outcomes or proposing punitive measures relating to compliance, colleges and universities across Virginia generally have been unable to document specific areas of effectiveness and improvement on their own (Aper, 1989). The process itself has proven slow in developing, creating a sense that institutional leaders may not view assessment as a priority matter (Ewell, 1991).

These developments coupled with the recent assertion of public officials that higher education is a strategic investment, enabling the state to build its economy and infrastructure by developing manpower and attracting new industry (Ewell, 1991), offer the prospect of study into the implementation of those guidelines that form Virginia's assessment program.

The procedural problem of this research was to analyze the extent of implementation of assessment legislation in Virginia's community colleges.

### **Purpose**

The purpose of the study was to determine the congruency of beliefs about the implementation of Virginia's student outcomes assessment program between members of the General Assembly and community college assessment practitioners.

In addition, the following ancillary purposes were addressed:

1. to synthesize the extant literature concerning state-mandated student outcomes assessment and public institutional accountability;
2. to identify those external influences and institutional factors that affect student outcomes assessment; and
3. to determine whether there exists a congruency of belief between the political domain of the state and the academic domain of the community college as to the effect of student outcomes assessment.

### **Research Questions**

The following general research questions were addressed in the study:

1. Do legislators believe that the assessment guidelines called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 have been satisfactorily implemented in Virginia's community colleges?
2. Do practitioners at the local community college believe that the assessment guidelines as called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 have been satisfactorily implemented in Virginia's community colleges?
3. Is there congruence between the beliefs of state legislators and community college practitioners regarding the implementation of assessment guidelines as called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 in Virginia's community colleges?

### Need for the Study

As a result of changing economic climates and increasing taxpayer demands for cost justification for practically every program, project, and activity, approaches to developing public higher education policy are changing. Post-secondary institutions across America, and specifically in Virginia, are being required to do more with less while providing even greater measures of accountability.

These factors may be influencing the beliefs of state and institutional interests concerning the implementation of student outcomes assessment, the implications of which could be significant to the future of higher education policy in the

Commonwealth. If there exists significant disparity between the beliefs of Virginia's legislators and community college practitioners as to the implementation of the Commonwealth's student outcomes assessment program, these incongruencies may have a significant effect on such fundamental processes as institutional planning and evaluation, state budgeting and incentive funding practices, curriculum development, institutional autonomy, and academic freedom. Perspectives and beliefs held by lawmakers are often determining factors in how law and policy are established. At the same time, beliefs held by academicians provide insight into how resulting institutional obligations and responsibilities will be addressed and applied. Studying the congruency of beliefs and perspectives between political interests and academic interests may assist in clarifying and defining future interaction and mediating differences between the state and its public colleges and universities. This investigation is important in determining the level of understanding, involvement, support, and importance of formal outcomes assessment from the vantage point of the legislature and the community college. Results may indicate tendencies toward increasing or decreasing intrusion of the government into the administration of individual colleges, impacting the traditional autonomy enjoyed by Virginia higher education institutions.



Identifying community college practitioners' beliefs concerning the implementation of Virginia's assessment effort in the face of reduced state revenues and changing budget priorities is important to any analysis of Virginia's efforts at assessing student achievement. In addition, identifying any prospects for linking assessment results to the budgeting process or new program proposals may indicate a necessary re-evaluation of institutional planning process and curricular development strategies.

The study is needed to expand the information base relative to the progress and contributions, or the lack of same, made through the student outcomes assessment program in Virginia some seven years after the establishment of Senate Document No. 14 which provided the foundation for Senate Joint Resolution 83 (1986).

### **Definitions**

**Assessment.** The meaning, as presented throughout this study, is taken from the Senate of Virginia Document No. 14, 1986. Those procedures related

directly to teaching and learning in the classroom, . . . including assessment of entry-level skills of students who might have difficulty doing college work, . . . identification of a minimum threshold of achievement for students to qualify for college degree-credit courses, . . . and establishment of standards for student progress to higher levels of curriculum; and is consistent with each

institution's mission and educational objectives (Virginia General Assembly, 1986a, pp. 15-17).

**Accountability.** Bowen (1977) states that achievement of accountability is determined by comparing outcomes of the system against the resources used to accomplish those outcomes. He elaborates that the resources employed and the outcomes must be measured. Gutman (1988) offers that accountability means making the standards and contentions of the institution open to public discussion.

**Student Outcomes.** Student outcomes are generally defined as abilities and skills in critical thinking, communication, and problem solving, and how they relate to work success, success in graduate education, and the quality of life that a student takes from the college experience (National Center for Educational Statistics, 1992). Virginia's public documents relating to the issue of assessment use "achievement" and "outcomes" interchangeably.

**Effectiveness.** Ewell and Lisensky (1988) define effectiveness as a process in which critical elements of institutional performance are defined by leadership and how the institution works toward advancing them. The Commonwealth Planning and Budgeting Manual (1986) views effectiveness in terms of the extent to which programs and/or subprograms are meeting the needs or conditions that they were designed to meet.

### **Organization of the Study**

The study was organized into five chapters. Chapter I included the introduction, conceptual framework, assumptions, delimitations and limitations, problem statement, purposes, research questions, study need, definitions, and organization of the study. Chapter II presented a comprehensive review of the literature related to coordination of higher education, institutional accountability, and student outcomes assessment in Virginia. Chapter III outlined the methods of research, including a discussion of population and sampling, the instrumentation, data collection, and analysis. Chapter IV presented the findings and analysis of the data organized around the research questions. Chapter V included the summary, conclusions and recommendations.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

As early as the first decade of the twentieth century, there was some misgiving about the effectiveness of America's institutions of higher learning (Hall, 1904). One of the first college leaders to express his concerns seriously was Henry C. King of Oberlin College in his annual report as president in 1908-09. Deciding to pursue his concerns, King appointed a faculty committee to consider the issue of institutional effectiveness. As a result of its deliberations, the committee drew up a list of strategic questions inquiring into college or university effectiveness and efficiency, and King made them part of his report (Furst, 1912).

Although nowhere in King's report did the word "survey" appear, the action of Oberlin is generally taken to be the beginning of the survey movement in higher education (Furst, 1912). Virginia, one of the first states to do so, undertook a statewide survey of higher education, which it published in 1912 (Eells, 1937).

Even though colleges and universities had engaged in self-studies before the twentieth century (Cheyney, 1940; Ricketts, 1930), it is not difficult to understand why it became more significant, early in this century, for colleges

and universities to survey matters of institutional effectiveness. These years happened to coincide with the period when industry was making scientific studies of its own effectiveness and efficiency under the leadership of Frederick W. Taylor (Cowley, 1960). They also coincided with the timely and contemporary development of scientific techniques in educational measurement (Eells, 1937), but from the 1920s onward it was possible to base institutional evaluation on much more exact data than before (Cowley, 1960).

Early studies in most higher education institutions focused on matters relating to budgeting and cost accounting (Buckingham, 1917; Coon, 1938; Hadley, 1913). Eventually, colleges and universities, particularly those that were publicly supported, began to pursue evaluation of the educational program itself. An obvious point of concern was duplication of offerings, not so much within institutions as between them (Abbott, 1958; Scott, 1964). States that supported more than one institution of higher education had difficulty in overcoming duplication. These colleges and institutions had become quite competitive while maintaining independent boards and independently approaching the legislature for funds (Abbott, 1958; Ertell, 1959; Miller, 1962). As the inter-institutional competition increased, an effort was made to overcome it by moving higher education

toward centralization of evaluation and administration in state government (Ertell, 1959; Miller, 1962).

### **Coordination of Higher Education**

Centralization of higher education followed two primary tracks, the early ones taking the lead of existing governmental agencies: initially the legislature and/or the governor, and, later, public coordinating boards. The focus, especially with state coordinating boards, has been on the pyramid of educational programs leading from the associate's or bachelor's through the master's to the doctor's degree. Generally, oversight was aimed at arbitrating inter-college and university competition and limiting curricular and program duplication (Ertell, 1959; Miller, 1962). In addition, coordination extended to the geographical distribution of academic programs over the various states (Miller, 1962; Scott, 1964). When coordination reached across state boundaries, regional boards of higher education, such as the Southern Regional Education Board and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education, were created to monitor competition and duplication (Ertell, 1959).

Some higher education adherents, college and university faculty in particular, thought they saw in the evolution of these events the demise of the autonomy of their institutions (Scott, 1964). Nevertheless, as important as the protection

afforded through institutional autonomy was, it was being viewed, by certain legislators and trustees, as an obstacle to uniform, statewide patterns of higher education (Martorana, 1975). Indeed, universities were inviting coordination to help create general examinations, set budget and finance standards, and establish future planning. The spirit of autonomy now seemed to be giving way to that of cooperation and coordination (Ertell, 1959; Miller, 1962; Scott, 1964).

Although central coordination was significant to the development of college and university governance, its threat to institutional autonomy proved more perceived than real. In fact a rough system of checks and balances was emerging. Pritchett (1905) and Shryock (1952) offer that coordinating boards and college and university administrators tended to check each other. Additionally, both had to reckon with the power of organized faculties, organized alumni, the general public, and the student body.

Coordination was framed further by the growing diversity of institutional types in American higher education. This diversity presented a picture of a system of colleges and universities focused on initiative rather than uniformity, freedom rather than constraint, responsiveness to the public rather than imposition by remote authority (Shryock, 1952). Daniel Resnick (1987) offers that approaches to coordinating and analyzing the effectiveness and efficiency of this diverse

system were complicated by the more than threefold increase in post-secondary undergraduate enrollments between 1954 and 1983. This growth was driven in part by the increased importance assigned in the workplace and society at large to additional years of education. Not quite half of the increase can be attributed to the baby boom. The rest came from an increase in the portion of the youth cohort that attended college (Resnick, 1987).

This period of expansion brought changes in the structures of higher education. A major change was the dramatic sevenfold growth in the number of community colleges: By 1986 about 1,350 two-year institutions, constituting 40 percent of all institutions of higher education, were in place. Along with this growth in institutional numbers came a commensurate increase in enrollment with approximately 4,671,000 students attending by the mid-1980s (Snyder, 1989).

As the size and diversity of higher education in America changed, so did the approach to state coordination. Over the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, state coordinating endeavors exhibited less control and more accommodation. For example, in the areas of admissions, internal budget allocations, salaries and benefits, and even curricular change, eventual positions were being arrived at usually through compromise between the institution and the state, or left to the devices of the college or university (Perkins, 1975).



Given the institutional growth and student population increases occurring during the immediate postwar years and through the early 1970s, the lessening of control and coordination at the state level appeared appropriate. Direct, specific coordination was difficult, and in some states impractical, because of the size and breadth of post-secondary education systems. Colleges and universities were having to assume a greater role in institutional decision making, control, and evaluation (Perkins, 1975).

As accommodating as state coordination had become during the decades of the 1960s and 1970s, it was the remarkable growth and diversification occurring during the period that, according to Richard Millard (1975), made stronger state and regional coordination an eventuality. He offers a number of positions supporting this contention. First, he argues the addition of community colleges, vocational-technical schools, proprietary schools, and various other institutions widened the range of post-secondary opportunity.

Second, budgetary appropriations were linked to programs, enrollments and institutional demographics which varied from college to college. Because of this fluctuation, increasing competition would arise among these same institutions for funding increases. There would also arise the competitive efforts to avoid funding decreases. As a result, hard decisions would have to be made in many institutions, but more

importantly, consistent, coordinated planning and development would be required.

Millard asserts that coordination of public colleges and universities at the state level became more critical as demands by the legislature and public for accountability and more effective use of funds to protect quality and increase efficiency, increased. "Clearer decisions with respect to institutional goals and to the development of role and scope determinations could not be left to the colleges and universities alone, but should be made in cooperation with state coordinating agencies" (Millard, 1975, pp. 205).

Where cooperation and coordination was found lacking, legislators, governors, and state budget officials would not hesitate to become directly involved in institutional affairs. Legislation had already been enacted respecting faculty work load, tenure, and transfer policies. The danger here, according to Millard, was that responsibility for planning and coordination for post-secondary education "would pass out of the hands of the institutions and higher education agencies, created for this purpose, and into the hands of agencies, or state interests for whom education would not constitute a first priority" (Millard, 1975, pp. 206).

However, throughout the late 1970s, and the decade of the 1980s, internal and external developments, such as budget strictures, increased legal and regulatory requirements, and

a deepening public skepticism of the quality of American higher education, had a significant effect on the course of American higher education. These realities were being confronted by some colleges and universities and ignored by others (Alfred & Weissman, 1988; Astin, 1985; Bennett & Peltason, 1985; Coombs, 1985; Delattre, 1988). Earnest Boyer predicted in 1975 that as the forces of economic uncertainty, confused institutional priorities, and public frustration with higher education become more acute "we will see greater coordination – it might be called standardization – compelled by requirements imposed on institutions legislatively or administratively from without" (Boyer, 1975, p. 199).

### **Outcomes Assessment, Accountability, and the State**

Boyer's forecast concerning increased coordination proved accurate, especially in the area of assessing undergraduate education. Throughout the 1950s, 1960s, and 1970s, state higher education policy throughout the states centered on the planned expansion of colleges and universities and the promotion of equity in access. In short, a mass market approach was followed (Pace, 1993). In the mid-1980s a number of reports were released that questioned the quality and capacity of higher education in America. Involvement in Learning (Study Group, 1984), To Reclaim a Legacy (Bennett, 1984), and Integrity in the College Curriculum (Association of

American Colleges, 1985) called for increased attention to the quality of undergraduate education, pointed to the eroding balance between teaching and research, called for an understanding of the college and university role in economic development, and supported the continuing need for mission clarification. The messages of these reports were not lost on state officials. Interest in accountability, connected to the public's diminishing trust in higher education, and state leaders' concern that higher education's priorities were not corresponding to public priorities, was increasing (Association of American Colleges, 1985; Bennett, 1984; National Governors' Association, 1986; Southern Regional Education Board, 1985). In their own studies during the same period, a number of states found evidence to suggest that student achievement had eroded on a number of measures,

that increased remediation was needed, that teaching assistants provided the bulk of teaching in a student's first two years in many universities, that promotion and tenure decisions as well as teaching loads favored research faculty and more (Garland, 1990, pp. 2-3).

Increasing scrutiny of public fund expenditures by the public and its concern over the role that colleges and universities were playing in the overall welfare of the state were encouraging legislators and state higher education officials to re-evaluate the contributions of public post-secondary education (Wasser, 1992). Through the 1970s and into the

early 1980s budgetary accountability gradually expanded to include academic accountability. New initiatives emerged that were intended to be far more searching and comprehensive in measuring student learning and promoting curricular reform in higher education (Aper, 1989).

In the 1980s, many states sought to move beyond auditing activities tied to financial regulation and to establish more performance-oriented reviews that could provide data on such factors as student achievement or job and education success after graduation (Barak, 1982; Ewell, 1985). Essentially, the goal focus of American higher education shifted to improving quality and to encouraging greater accountability (Pace, 1993). These were the concerns that in the 1980s came to shape state mandates for the assessment of student learning (Bottum, 1988; Ewell, 1985). Following this line of thought, the 1988 report of the Southern Regional Education Board called for "the quality and effectiveness of all colleges and universities to be regularly assessed, with particular emphasis on the performance of undergraduate students" (Southern Regional Education Board, 1988, p. 14).

The current interest in assessment of student learning and outcomes is a consequence of the uncertainty about the quality of the product of American higher education and demands by government officials, business leaders, and critics from within and outside the academy for greater institutional

accountability (Association of American Colleges, 1985; Bennett, 1984; Bloom, 1982; Bonham, 1980; Ewell, 1989; Hacker, 1986; Hartle, 1986; Jaschik, 1985; Lawrence & Green, 1980; National Governors' Association, 1986; Southern Regional Education Board, 1985). Initially, the focus of accountability requirements tended to be on efforts to quantify the inputs and general outputs of higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Lawrence, Weathersby, & Patterson, 1970). During the 1980s the emphasis shifted toward the state's obtaining evidence of the effectiveness of colleges and universities in educating students. Newman (1987, p. 2) explains this trend in his study of state/university relations, contending that

at best, the relationship between the state and the state university is an appropriate effort by those elected and appointed to state office to set goals, allocate resources, hold accountable and encourage those who govern the state university. We have called this appropriate public policy.

States have adopted various measures intended to more closely coordinate and enhance institutional accountability, and/or provide impetus for the reform and improvement of educational practice (Banta & Moffett, 1987; Boyer, Ewell, Finney, & Mingle, 1987; Ewell & Boyer, 1988). The assessment of student educational outcomes has the lead role in addressing state demands for greater accountability in public colleges and universities (Ewell, 1991). Ewell, Finney, and

Lenth (1990, p. 1) report that "by 1990, all but nine states had in place a policy on assessment of some kind, affecting all but a handful of public campuses." More recently, both public and private institutions have been affected by similar decisions to require assessment on the part of all six regional accrediting bodies (Ewell, 1993; Ewell, Finney, & Lenth, 1990). The 1992 Campus Trends Survey reports that 92 percent of the nation's colleges and universities were engaged in assessment and strongly supports the conclusion that their decision to begin was made in response to one or more external requirements (El-Khawas, 1992).

The interest and eventual incursion of state officials, accrediting agencies, and the like in student assessment as a measure of effectiveness is only one of the more recent manifestations of a long-standing tension between college and university autonomy and accountability to governmental and regulatory authorities (Resnick, 1987; Wasser, 1992). Ewell (1991, p.12) states:

For a time it appeared that these ends were compatible; that the public and academic agendas could be made broadly coincident. . . . Most states settled on a decentralized path that allowed institutions considerable latitude in developing their own approach to assessment. So long as each institution assessed its students' learning, and thereby showed its care for undergraduate improvement, the public charge would be met.

However, as assessment programs emerged they did so in bewildering variety. Though they shared many features, no two

state assessment mandates were alike (Ewell, 1991; Hutchings & Marchese, 1990). Some were established directly by statute, the majority by the action of a statewide governing or coordinating board, and a few by executive order (Paulson, 1990). Examples of some of the various approaches taken to mandating state assessment programs in higher education were highlighted in the 1993 report of the Southern Regional Education Board: Arkansas, Florida, Kentucky, Louisiana, South Carolina, Tennessee, and West Virginia have accountability legislation requiring periodic reporting on a cluster of performance indicators. In Maryland, North Carolina, Oklahoma, Texas, and Virginia, legislation called for higher education agencies to develop and report on measures of higher education's effectiveness. A few states, Tennessee, for example, have linked institutional accountability to budgets, so that specific funds are provided to encourage and reward improvement (Bogue, Creech, & Folger, 1993). Despite the differences of approach taken by many states in assessing student outcomes, three major categories of assessment have evolved. In each, data are used for different purposes. The program improvement category provides information to students so they may gauge their individual performance. Students can be tested as incoming students and again as they exit the institution. This provides a measure of educational gains from their college years, the "value added" approach. The



program improvement category requires active use by faculty and administrators of the information collected to effect change in meeting the institution's mission and goals (Astin, 1984; Muffo & Bunda, 1993; Turnbull, 1987). The gateway model involves a heavy emphasis on competencies and the use of competency examinations to ensure appropriate advancement of students. In Florida, for example, every sophomore in the state must pass a standard examination before achieving junior status. This model has been the subject of much criticism (Belcher, 1986; Ewell, 1991; Hirsch, 1987). A third category involving student outcomes assessment relates to its role in budgeting and resource allocation. Many states look to colleges and universities as an investment of public funds, and use assessment results as a means of determining whether there is a return on that investment. Base budget decisions and the awarding of programmatic incentive funding in some states, Tennessee as an example of the former, and Virginia the latter, are predicated on the determined monetary return discerned from assessment reports and outcomes (Banta & Moffett, 1987; Ewell & Boyer, 1988). A review of those states implementing student outcomes assessment programs reveals the incorporation of one or a combination of all of these categories in their development.

Banta and Ewell argue that as differentiated as the approaches to outcomes assessment may be, there have been

examples of improvement and change demonstrated in some state programs. Ewell (1993, p. 351) offers:

Some states have used assessment results directly to inform specific policy decisions. In Florida, Texas, and New Jersey, early results of statewide basic skills examinations helped build a case for resource reallocation to better support developmental programs at two-year colleges. And even where few comparable statewide results are available, state authorities are beginning to detect patterns in local results that can be used in their planning and setting of priorities; for instance, in Virginia with regard to general education, or in New Jersey and Tennessee with regard to minority student achievement.

Banta (1993, p. 357) states that

although we can point to improvements in programs and services that are traceable to campus assessment efforts, the external constituencies of higher education may be disappointed that concrete, objective evidence of better student learning is sparse.

A number of institutions such as Alverno College, Northeast Missouri State University, and a few institutions in Tennessee have reported improvements. These, however, are reflective of long-term practice (these colleges and universities have been involved in assessment practice for more than ten years) that would not apply to the vast majority of institutions, nationally, that have attempted assessment implementation quickly in an endeavor to satisfy state or accreditation requirements (Erwin, 1991).

Contributing to the mixed results of institutional student outcomes assessment programs are the uncertainty and

vagueness associated with the tension between the two principal purposes of assessment: demonstrating accountability and improving curricula, instruction, and student services (Banta, 1993; Ewell, 1991; Hirsch, 1987). External constituencies impel colleges and universities to undertake assessment for the purpose of accountability, but to members of the academy, especially faculty, the improvement of student learning can provide enough intellectual justification for the investment of their time and energy in new methods of measuring student learning and overall outcomes. In addition college and university administrators balk at the notion of demonstrating outcomes when so much of their time is involved in implementing and overseeing various assessment guidelines and regulations (Banta, 1993; Ewell, 1991; Hutchings & Reuben, 1988).

Research and related literature point to differing conceptual perspectives of student outcomes assessment held by those within colleges and those outside the academy at the state level, who influence its purpose and operation, as an important factor in judging assessment practices. Patrick Terenzini holds that

an inadequate conceptual foundation for an assessment program will produce confusion, anxiety, and more heat than light. Assessment requires reconsideration of the essential purposes and expected academic and nonacademic outcomes of a college education (Terenzini, 1989, p. 645).

He regards definitional issues as key to the success of an assessment attempt. The words have differing meanings to different constituencies. In arriving at a common understanding of the meaning of assessment, Terenzini requests that three questions be considered: "What is the purpose of assessment? What is to be the level of assessment? What is to be assessed?" (Terenzini, 1989, p. 646). Using a typology by Peter Ewell, he outlines a "Taxonomy of Approaches to Assessment," which he believes could be useful to assessment planners. Terenzini is intrigued by R. A. Yanikoski's suggestion that we think and speak in

terms of "progress assessment" rather than "outcomes assessment." Conceptually, . . . "assessing progress" implies an ongoing, formative process, which, in turn suggests that time remains to make any necessary improvements (Terenzini, 1989, p. 651).

The perspectives of those inside the academy relate process and continuous improvement as a strength and, ultimately, a rationale for assessing student achievement. Hutchings and Marchese (1990, p. 14) say "assessment" is about student learning, and is in fact a "set of questions" about the "college's contribution to student learning over time, . . . what the degree implies, . . . how student learning can be improved" and other questions. Daughdrill (1988, p. 52), in an article in the Chronicle of Higher Education, sees the assessment movement in America as very

positive. He stated that assessment, even in its infancy, "was doing more for education, for institutions, and for faculty members than any other development in recent history." When successfully accomplished, institutional assessment will: (1) bring the focus back to higher education where it should be, on education, teaching, and learning; (2) re-emphasize the critical role of faculty and good teaching, what comes out of college experiences, not what goes in; and (3) serve to define and differentiate institutions (Daughdrill, 1988).

Convincing state legislatures and higher education coordinating agencies to concur with the concepts of progress assessment and continuing improvement as appropriate in developing assessment strategies has proven difficult and sometimes acrimonious (Banta, 1993; Ewell, 1991; Resnick, 1987). The reasons for this difficulty are grounded in basic political perspectives. State officials want to understand where the money invested in higher education goes and how well it is being spent (Boulard, 1988; Ewell, 1985; Slaughter, 1985). Legislators tend to view higher education enterprise from the same perspective as a business person, seeking to draw parallels between outputs from the business world and outputs in education (Erwin, 1991). Secondly, legislators and state higher education officials have developed an appreciation for standard competency testing as a uniform means of evaluating educational systems. Beginning in the

late 1960s competency testing in the high schools created acceptable evaluation of system and statewide efforts to certify minimum levels of ability in reading, writing, and math among students in public institutions (College Board, 1983; Resnick, 1982). In the early and mid-1980s demands for competency testing were extended to colleges and universities. Florida, New Jersey, and Tennessee led the way in imposing mandated competency testing (Banta, 1993; Ewell, 1991). Resnick (1987, p. 11) offers that

state legislatures demanded demonstrations of gains in achievements. They wanted to see gains in learning by students during their undergraduate years, and they wanted to see them measured by standardized tests.

Losak (1987), in his work on the development of standardized measures of achievement in the state of Florida, argues that the intervention of state legislators in the assessment of students had been the clear message to faculty in the state of Florida that their past evaluations of students had not been satisfactory. The state mandated the College Level Academic Skills Test (CLAST) essentially because the "public had lost faith in the assessment process used by instructors in their classrooms to arrive at grades" (Losak, 1987, p. 27). A passing score on the CLAST is required of all students seeking an associate in arts degree, and it is designed to measure the communication and computation skills that community college faculty members expect students who complete the second year

of college to possess (Losak, 1987). The development of the CLAST in Florida, the ACT-COMP in Tennessee, the New Jersey Basic Skills Test, the College Base examination in Missouri, and the Georgia Regents Examination was mandated, in part, because they are easily administered, and they are less open to charges of subjectivity. Because they are administered at many institutions, it is possible to compare scores among institutions, and there is an immediacy to comprehensive testing and reporting, for accountability to public demand and investment, that progress assessment, assessment over time, lacks (Ewell, 1989; Resnick, 1987, Terenzini, 1989).

As appealing and responsible as specific, centralized prescriptions; standardized testing; and the like appeared to a number of states, most settled on a decentralized path that allowed institutions considerable latitude in developing their own approach to assessment (Ewell, 1991). Hutchings and Marchese (1990) found that institutions, fearful of mandated statewide testing, have proven effective in convincing state leaders to establish broad parameters to measure student progress and institutionalize responses to those measurements. Aper, Culver, and Hinkle (1990, p. 476) offer that state policy makers should be explicit about how the assessment information will be used: "Assessment mandates seem to imply that something is wrong with the institution and needs to be corrected." They argue that institutional practitioners'

efforts at implementing assessment practices out of fear of official corrective action are counterproductive to initiative that can produce new approaches to general education, encourage new kinds of teaching, and promote undergraduate quality. (Aper, Culver, & Hinkle, 1990).

Ewell and Boyer (1988, p. 47) found that

contrary to wide belief, state leaders were more than willing to listen to a range of local options in assessment. Harder for state leaders and policy makers to accept was institutional silence. . . . They recognized that meaningful assessment requires institutional and faculty ownership, and they took pains to keep their initial approaches flexible, expecting institutions to respond accordingly. But resulting ambiguities in the language of state guidelines often appeared sinister at the institutional level. . . . Many colleges thought it safer to wait and see.

### **Post-Secondary Education Coordination in Virginia**

The Virginia Plan for Higher Education (SCHEV, 1987b) explains that states the perceived need to institute some form of assessment has engendered different reactions. In some states, institutions have been encouraged, but not required to develop individual student assessment programs. Comprehensive assessment programs and standardized testing procedures have been established in others. The publication offers that Virginia s took the middle ground by allowing individual colleges to define and implement those assessment methods appropriate to their singular missions.



Some colleges and universities, such as Alverno and Northeast Missouri State, considered pioneers in the national student outcomes assessment movement, began their programs as institutional endeavors spurred by internal impetus (Banta & Moffett, 1987). Most, however, entered the assessment arena because of encouragement and mandates from influences external to the institution (Ewell, 1989; Ewell, 1991; Ewell, 1993; Newman, 1987). This follows a philosophical assertion by Kerr (1972) that many of the most significant innovations in the college and university originate as desires and demands of external groups.

Virginia's colleges and universities can trace their formal assessment roots to the influence and direction of a state coordinating interest, specifically the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV) (Aper, 1989; Ewell, 1989; Ewell, 1990; Ewell, 1991; Fuhrmann & Gentemann, 1993). SCHEV was created by legislation in 1956, and its initial duties included coordination, program approval, and review of institutional budget requests (Kellogg, 1974). Early on, SCHEV assumed its coordination tasks with a focus on gaining uniform annual financial reports and uniform reporting of educational data from colleges and universities (SCHEV, 1960). SCHEV's Biennial Report (1961) recommended cost studies that would investigate practices such as course proliferation, low student-teacher ratios, limited class sizes, and unusual

overhead costs. The Virginia Higher Education Study Commission (1965) recommended an expanded role for SCHEV to include not only budgeting and related matters, but also that it should become the advisory agency to the governor and general assembly regarding planning, policy, and higher education funding. Subsequently, as SCHEV's role in state government expanded, so did its emphasis on efficiency and effectiveness (SCHEV, 1967; SCHEV, 1974). The "Integrated Data Gathering and Analysis System" was developed as a result of the Higher Education Act of 1965 (SCHEV, 1966), and was designed to collect data in seven areas: classes taught, students, programs, faculty and staff, facilities, finance, and related information (Kellogg, 1974; SCHEV, 1967). The first Virginia Plan for Higher Education (1967) encouraged the need for greater information from public higher education institutions to assist in better planning and coordination. In 1974 SCHEV's authority was extended to include the identification and elimination of unproductive academic programs (Aper, 1989; SCHEV, 1973). Unproductive programs are defined in the 1992 revision of the Code of Virginia in terms of "the number of degrees granted, the number of students served . . . and budgetary considerations" (Code of Virginia, 1992, Section 23-9.6:1(6), p.134). This law also gives SCHEV greater responsibility for academic program approval, enrollment projections, long-range planning, and budget

review, including authority to develop a comprehensive system to collect uniform data, and to develop policies, formulae, and guidelines for institutional use in preparing budget requests (Code of Virginia, 1992, Section 23-9.6:1). The Council was also directed in the law to "insofar as practicable, preserve the individuality, traditions and sense of responsibility of the respective institutions" (Code of Virginia, 1992, Section 23-9.6:1 (15), p.135).

During the 1970s the approach to agency funding in Virginia was modified from traditional formula or guideline funding to program budgeting (Aper, 1989; Kellogg, 1974). This budgeting approach was defined by the Department of Planning and Budget as having six components, "identification of common statewide efforts in a program structure; identification and statement of program goals and objectives; establishment of program priorities; appropriation of funds according to programs; monitoring and evaluation of programs; and projection of revenues and expenditures beyond one biennium to permit better planning" (Department of Planning and Budget, 1986, p. I-6-13). SCHEV used this budgetary refinement to further focus its evaluation of programs and individual institutional initiatives (Aper, 1989; SCHEV, 1977). In the 1981 Virginia Plan, the Council encouraged this type of funding change, arguing that

the guidelines used to ensure equitable distribution of funds need to be changed to place less emphasis upon the size of an institution and more emphasis upon what it does and how well it does it (SCHEV, 1981, p. 8).

Although the history of Virginia higher education has featured strong and autonomous institutions and relatively weak coordinating boards, expectations from the General Assembly and governor's office since the early 1970s were high for SCHEV to provide broad policy guidance (General Assembly Commission on Higher Education, 1974; Office of the Governor, 1978). Over time, the Council became more assertive in formulating and advancing a policy agenda for Virginia higher education with the legislature and with the institutions themselves (Davies, 1987). The state legislature, in encouraging a statewide assessment policy, conferred primary responsibility on SCHEV to develop and guide the process (Virginia General Assembly, 1986a; Virginia General Assembly, 1986b).

### **Assessment in Virginia**

Prior to 1985 the only institution in Virginia actively involved in developing student outcomes assessment plans was James Madison University (Aper, 1989; Erwin, 1991). However, a number of developments at the state and national levels occurring during the early 1980s would place Virginia on a path toward a statewide mandate to measure student achievement

and assure quality in higher education. The interest of national commissions, educational associations and organizations, governors, and state officials in colleges and universities providing acceptable measures of what they do and how they do it grew more acute during the decades of the 1970s and 1980s (Association of American Colleges, 1985; Bowen, 1977; Ewell, 1987; National Governors' Association, 1986; Resnick, 1987; SCHEV, 1972). This interest expanded in tandem with increased demands on public resources, creating an atmosphere in which mandates for evidence of budgetary efficiency and educational effectiveness became compelling to legislators and governors in many states, including Virginia (Bowen, 1977; National Governors' Association, 1986; SCHEV, 1972; SCHEV, 1981).

Virginia's assessment mandate followed on the heels of the 1984 adoption of new standards for institutional effectiveness by the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS), the southeast's regional accrediting body. These standards called for the "evaluation of the results of education and plans for the improvement of the institution's programs" (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1992, p. 15). The SACS' prescribed processes for planning and evaluation encourages broad-based participation by faculty, staff, students, and administration. The prescription include must statements relating to the creation of clearly defined

purposes appropriate to collegiate education. The process goes on to require the designation of educational goals to those defined purposes. The development of procedures for evaluating how these stated educational goals are being achieved, and how the results of these evaluations will be used to improve institutional programs, services and operations are also mandated (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1992).

While predating the development of assessment practices guidelines by the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC) by two years, Virginia's plan for assessing student outcomes incorporated those principles. The NASULGC proposal was centered around seven principles generally advocating the maintenance of institutional autonomy throughout the formation of assessment plans, and that the institutions themselves should develop institutional programs and define indicators of quality appropriate to their missions and goals (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 1988).

The national trend by many states encouraging greater accountability on the part of public colleges and universities through prescribed assessment policies and practices and the development of regional and national standards regarding assessment played a significant role in the formation of Virginia's assessment program. Those effects, along with the

evolution of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia's interest and involvement in coordinating public post-secondary education, laid the groundwork for Senate Joint Resolution No. 125, enacted in 1985, which directed SCHEV to "investigate means by which student achievement may be measured to assure the citizens of Virginia the continuing high quality of higher education in the Commonwealth" (Virginia General Assembly, 1985, p.1). The following year the study called for in the resolution was presented to the General Assembly as Senate Document No. 14, and was accepted in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83. In that legislation, the General Assembly asked all public institutions in Virginia "to establish assessment programs to measure student achievement," with the proviso that

the Council, in cooperation with the colleges and universities, should establish guidelines for designing good assessment programs and report to the public results of institutional efforts to measure student achievement in its biennial revisions of the Virginia Plan for Higher Education (Virginia General Assembly, 1986a).

In January 1987, a task force of institutional representatives was formed to work with SCHEV staff to devise the "Guidelines for Student Assessment," which SCHEV approved April 3, 1987. These guidelines moved away from a statewide test in favor of individual plans "appropriate to the mission of each institution" and that reflected "diversity of program goals." The guidelines left wide latitude for institutions to

devise their own approach; urged use of existing data and sensitivity to assessment's effects on students; asked for attention to general education, remediation, the major, and alumni follow-up; made clear that the object was not to compare colleges "but to improve student learning and performance"; and required evidence that the effort was "useful" and linked to "programs to address identified areas of weakness." Each institution was required to report yearly to SCHEV, first on its plan, then on its progress, and have these approved. The guidelines were passed on to the 39 public colleges and universities in Virginia to help them in formulating their assessment plans, which had to be submitted by June 30, 1987 (SCHEV, 1987a, pp. 1-4). The Council's expectation would be to see "results," and these would be "concrete, more than anecdotal, and presented in quantified form" (Virginia General Assembly, 1986a, p. 17).

Most institutional representatives took this to mean a central role for nationally normed, cognitive achievement tests, though framers of the guidelines had intentionally avoided mentioning that alternative (Ewell & Boyer, 1988, p. 43).

In May 1987 the governor issued his "guidance memorandum" to the institutions for development of the 1988-1990 budget request. In it, the governor stipulated that institutional eligibility for incentive funding would depend, among other things, on having submitted an acceptable student assessment plan by the June 30, 1987 deadline (Miller, 1987). All



institutional plans were reviewed by SCHEV staff and three outside consultants in July 1987. Some were judged to be adequate and some were accepted with stipulations. A few plans were vague, underdeveloped, or demonstrated inadequate understanding of the nature of student assessment; they were rewritten (Boyer & Ewell, 1988).

Funding for institutional assessment efforts was provided to base budget allocations of approximately \$12 per full-time equivalent student. Institutions were permitted to use these resources to implement assessment and provide campus coordination for institutional programs (SCHEV, 1987b).

To date, each institution within the Virginia system of higher education has developed assessment plans and makes annual reports to SCHEV on their individual innovations, results, and general progress. Aper and Hinkle (1991, p. 543-544) state that

borrowing from the lexicon of the marketplace, both legislative and SCHEV staff referred to these institutional assessment efforts as providing important "consumer information" to prospective students and their parents.

The prevailing attitude of the executive branch was described by the then Secretary of Education Donald Finley, who argued that

the results of assessment are going to be more long term and better if we try to build a mechanism that allows the faculty and students to do it themselves, under a very decentralized model and trust them to carry forth, . . . that . . . will be

much more productive than trying to drive something home . . . out of Richmond (Finley, 1989, p. 544).

### **Summary**

The review of related literature included written works on the coordination of higher education by state government in America. The review focused on the evolution of outcomes assessment as an element of state higher education policy and issues related to institutional accountability and the state. Studies were cited on the growth of higher education coordination in Virginia.

The review narrowed to those writings examining assessment in Virginia. This review section centered on the influence and effect of formal legal and regulatory documents on the development of mandated student outcomes assessment in the Commonwealth.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODS OF RESEARCH

Considerations of institutional autonomy and diversity that have traditionally framed Virginia's system of higher education became guiding principles in the development of the state's approach to assessing student achievement. Interest in calling upon colleges and universities to conduct activities to assess student learning emerged as a major legislative initiative in Virginia in the mid-1980s. The Commonwealth's institution-centered plan for student assessment presented an appealing strategy to many states instituting mandated assessment (Ewell, 1993). At the same time, other states and institutions were watching to see if central efforts to encourage initiative, internal review, and reform could be effective without being heavy handed (Aper, 1989; Ewell & Boyer, 1988).

Virginia's plan for student outcomes assessment was formulated from the "top down," devised by the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia, supported by the Governor, and ultimately, the General Assembly, with the passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 83. This legislation, mandating statewide student assessment, allowed individual colleges and universities to develop their own approaches to measuring student learning. As a result of the desire not to

characterize assessment as an accountability mechanism, the implementation of these approaches has been guided by general and sometimes vague guidelines and expectations from SCHEV and other state officials (Aper, 1989; Hutchings & Marchese, 1990).

The purpose of this study was to compare the beliefs about the implementation of Virginia's student outcomes assessment program of members of the General Assembly and community college assessment practitioners. There were three ancillary purposes addressed:

1. to synthesize the extant literature concerning state-mandated student outcomes assessment and public higher education accountability;
2. to identify those external influences and institutional factors that affect student outcomes assessment; and
3. to determine whether there exists a congruency of belief between the legislative element of the state and the academic element of the community college as to the implementation of student outcomes assessment in Virginia.

### **Design of the Study**

The study employed both quantitative and qualitative research techniques to investigate student outcomes assessment

in Virginia. The quantitative phase, using the Chi-square test for independence, involved the collection of data to be used in developing and implementing the qualitative phase. The latter phase involved a variation of case study methods allowing for investigations of the attitudes, beliefs, experiences, and perceptions of individuals involved in the higher education assessment process. Naturalistic inquiry and field study traditions found in ethnographic research played an important role in the study design (Pelto & Pelto, 1978). Ethnography is defined as "the systematic process of observing, detailing, describing, documenting, and analyzing the culture, or patterns of people in their environment" (Leininger, 1985, p.35). This research approach "permits the researcher to obtain insights into the meaning of particular things and events as understood by the participants of a culture" (Evaneshko & Kay, 1982, p. 49).

Ethnography uses "life history" interviews as an important strategy (Spradley, 1980). Denzin (1978, p. 215) defines life histories as essentially case studies that present "the experiences and definitions held by one person, one group, or one organization as this person, group, or organization interprets these experiences."

In this study, the life history described a "slice of life" that provided a useful and appropriate means of gathering a body of focused information about an individual's

perceptions and beliefs concerning implementation of Virginia's mandated student outcomes assessment program, and which factors or events influenced these points of view. The interviews provided rich, contextual information that allowed individuals to present their experiences, beliefs, and reasoning in ways that are meaningful to them. Such information would have proven difficult to gather through a survey or questionnaire alone.

### **Population**

The population for this study was purposefully delimited to consist of those members of the Virginia General Assembly and community college practitioners working in their respective capacities one year prior to enactment of Virginia's mandated student outcomes assessment law through March 1, 1994.

### **Sample**

For qualitative research, Glaser and Strauss (1967) recommend theoretical sampling. This form of sampling involves purposeful selection of those people who offer the most theoretical relevance to the situation and concepts under study. When comparison groups are used, theoretical sampling also serves the purpose of providing

simultaneous maximization, or minimization of both the differences and the similarities of data that bear on the categories being studied. This control over similarities and differences is vital for discovering categories, and for developing and relating their theoretical properties, all necessary for the development of an emergent theory (Glaser & Strauss, 1967, p. 55).

Comparison groups included the following informants: those who served on the Education Committee of the Virginia House of Delegates in 1986, six in number, and who are presently serving on that committee. In addition, six informants who served on the Education and Health Committee of the Virginia Senate in 1986 and who are currently serving on that committee were chosen. These purposefully selected participants were suggested to the dissertation chair and committee members for approval. Their inclusion was agreed to with the caveat that each be assigned a code number. This was done to assure the anonymity of the participants and to increase objectivity essential to the study. The codes randomly assigned to the Delegate participants were D-1, D-2, D-3, D-4, D-5, and D-6. The codes randomly assigned to the Senate participants were S-1, S-2, S-3, S-4, S-5, and S-6. This purposefully selected sample was important to the study since these informants had direct involvement in deliberations and decisions that led to final passage of mandated assessment legislation in the Commonwealth.

The purposefully selected sample of practitioners, eleven in number, from within the Virginia Community College System composed of those individuals with responsibility for implementation and oversight of the guidelines established by SCHEV to formulate student outcomes assessment at individual community colleges. These purposefully selected participants were suggested to the dissertation chair and committee members for approval. Their inclusion was agreed to with the caveat that each be assigned code letters. This was done to ensure the anonymity of the participants and to increase objectivity essential to the study. The codes randomly assigned to the institutional assessment practitioners were: P-A, P-B, P-C, P-D, P-E, P-F, P-G, P-H, P-I, P-J, and P-K.

### **Instrumentation**

Initially, the study employed a survey composed of questions directly related to the assessment implementation guidelines called for in Senate Joint Resolution 83, and prescribed in the Memo to the Members of the SCHEV Instructional Advisory Committee (Miller, 1989). Review of official public documents and related literature also contributed to the development of the survey instrument. Even though the individual instrument items required objective responses, each offered the respondents the opportunity for open comment. A copy of the guidelines, as established by



SCHEV staff, accompanied each survey instrument to help ensure informed responses. The consistency of administration was very important to the study since it related to the issue of validity. Care was taken to assure that all surveys were administered in the same manner – all to office addresses – and follow-up contact by telephone was initiated to assure clarity of understanding and subjects' completion.

The responses to the surveys, in addition to information gleaned from related literature, and official documents were employed as the framework for personal, follow-up interviews and provided a starting point for interview subjects to expand on the initial survey responses and elaborate on their experiences and perspectives regarding implementation of Virginia's outcomes assessment program.

### **Survey Pilot Test**

The questionnaire was pilot tested using subjects similar to those in the larger study. The survey instrument was administered to two participants who are directly involved in the coordination of assessment on their respective college campuses and are very familiar with the assessment mandate and resulting program guidelines. Each of these individuals has more than five years experience with Virginia's assessment effort. Additionally, the instrument was given to a research specialist with twenty years of experience and expertise in

questionnaire development and analysis, a grammar specialist, and a current member of the General Assembly who served during the time in which Virginia's assessment mandate evolved. The purpose of the pilot endeavor was to field test the survey instrument to determine the clarity of questions, effectiveness of instructions, completeness of response sets, and successful data collection techniques, all important in ensuring questionnaire validity (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

The responses from the pilot participants indicated a general agreement concerning clarity and effectiveness of instructions. The researcher participating in the pilot phase indicated appropriateness in employing forced choice responses throughout the questionnaire. These responses along with the analysis of related documents provided an adequate base for the succeeding qualitative phase. There were recommendations as to wording and those were incorporated.

### **Data Collection**

Ethnographer James Spradley has described in detail structured strategies for data collection and analysis in hands-on work with actual data (Miles & Huberman, 1984). His methods allow other researchers to examine easily the data and the way in which findings and inferences have been drawn during analysis of the data. Spradley's methods were used for data collection and analysis in this study. They are:

1. document analysis, which attempts to determine official guidelines and positions;
2. personal interviews, which attempt to record what people recall about their experiences, and how they currently perceive issues and developments; and
3. a record of the researcher's personal observations (Spradley, 1980).

The initial source of data for this study involved extensive review of all official public documents pertinent to the formulation and implementation of Virginia's mandated student outcomes assessment program. Documents reviewed included official papers of state agencies; bills and resolutions of the General Assembly; and reports, memoranda, and published research and analysis of assessment policy pertaining to Virginia. These documents, along with a questionnaire that elicited responses regarding the implementation guidelines of Virginia's assessment program, established the basis for personal interviews. These interviews became the primary source of data for this study.

Interviewees were purposefully selected on the basis of their most theoretical relevance to and access to information to the questions under study. The purpose of the interviews was to gather information relative to the subjects' experiences and perceptions surrounding the implementation of

those guidelines that are central to the current status of assessment in Virginia.

### **Analysis**

Document analysis was undertaken to ascertain the exact legal requirements and intent of Virginia's mandated assessment legislation. This document analysis involved identification of the processes and policies associated with Virginia higher education that served to fashion mandated assessment law and the subsequent implementation guidelines.

Responses from the questionnaire, which was predicated on the legal intent of Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 and subsequent SCHEV guidelines, were analyzed using the Chi-square test for independence. This test was selected because of its appropriateness of use with small sample sizes (Siegel, 1956). An alpha level of .05 was established to avoid concluding that a significant difference existed between the sample groups when it did not. Examination of differences in proportion of responses assisted in identifying broad, general themes from the respective subject groups and to establish points of congruence and/or disagreement between the cohorts. This analysis served to establish individual questions and overall schedule of inquiry to be used during the interview phase.

Surveys have the potential to pinpoint quickly areas that should be addressed more specifically by follow-up research. The gathering quantitative data followed by a qualitative data collection strategy served to provide a desirable quantitative base for qualitative research (Campbell, 1978).

Using the document and survey analysis to create a base of inquiry, personal interviews were conducted. Transcripts from these interviews were analyzed to determine congruence of beliefs and perceptions between the legislative and academic cultures as to the implementation of assessment in Virginia. More specifically, the interview responses were studied to identify common or recurrent themes that may emerge. Morris Opler (1945, p. 198) defined a theme as "a postulate or position, declared or implied, and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted in a society." Spradley (1980, p. 141) states that these themes take the form of cognitive principles; "something that people believe and accept as true and valid; they are assumptions about the nature of their commonly held experiences." The interview questions were structural in that they focused on specific elements related to the "Guidelines for Student Assessment. They concentrated on the experiences and beliefs of politicians and academic practitioners relative to the development of assessing student achievement in the Commonwealth.

Beginning with a set of structured primary questions, follow-up questions were employed to ensure greater accuracy, clarity, and understanding. Subjects were encouraged to explore freely and in detail their knowledge and beliefs about assessment in Virginia. When unusually restrictive bounds have not been imposed, such interviewing has allowed for a more flexible, comprehensive, detailed, insightful analysis (Helmstadter, 1970; Measor, 1985; Spradley, 1980). Data analysis focused on themes and beliefs that are both similar and contrasting, with the aim of generating a number of working postulates, and with a view toward generating knowledge that would guide future studies in student outcomes assessment in Virginia higher education.

### **Interview Protocol**

Using a quantitative approach, survey results were analyzed to determine subject areas to be addressed during the interview phase. This determination was made by reviewing the response sets for each survey question and discerning proportional differences among and between the legislative and practitioner groups. In addition, from the review of related literature and document analysis topics, relative to outcomes assessment, were identified to be pursued during the interview phase of the study. These subject areas and topics were then incorporated into interview questions designed to elicit

responses that would define how subjects interpreted various elements of Virginia's assessment guidelines. The interview questions also sought to encourage reflection as to how they arrived at certain beliefs concerning the mandated student outcomes assessment program. The researcher employed this approach to facilitate expanded meaning during the interview process (Gloeckner, 1984).

Respondents were probed first as to their general legislative or professional experience relative to mandated outcomes assessment. Subjects were then queried using document analysis and survey responses as a basis and asked to elaborate relative to various aspects of Virginia's assessment program as described in the "Guidelines for Student Assessment."

These elements were useful in identifying important concepts and issues to be explored during the interview phase.

### **Reliability**

To ensure reliability, the researcher provided a description of the steps used in developing the investigation. These steps are described in the data collection, analysis, and interview protocol sections of the study. The review of specific documents, the relationship of the survey instrument to the "Guidelines for Student Assessment" and the theoretical sampling method used to select subjects and the interview

protocol enabled the researcher to strengthen the relationship between the approach to research and the object of the research. The intention was to offer a more substantial basis upon which the reader may judge the quality of the relationship between procedures and intentions (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

The researcher sought to elicit frank and open responses from subjects, while maintaining critical awareness of the issues and of each subject's comments (Measor, 1985).

### **Validity**

Validity in qualitative research is taken to be a function of the accuracy of the interpretation of collected data (Kirk & Miller, 1986). Validity in qualitative research is a necessity in making sense of the information gathered; however, there are no generally agreed upon methods of determining the validity of qualitative research (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

By obtaining multiple instances of key information or ideas from different sources, findings were reinforced through an inductive process of analysis. The responses of one subject cohort in this study were compared to responses provided by another subject group. Information available through documents or other written materials, and responses obtained by other researchers, such as Aper and Hinkle (1991),



Ewell and Boyer (1988), and Hutchings and Marchese (1990) were also compared. This comparison provided an expanded information base to the study and served to refine the direction of the research. This procedure is offered by qualitative researchers as a means of reviewing and assuring validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1980).

Perceptions muted over time and uncertain recollections of individuals as a data source pose a threat to validity. Triangulation of data through document analysis, comparisons of interview subjects' responses, and the use of the same format and pre-specified sets of questions across interviews to maintain some uniformity in the interviewing process were employed to mitigate this threat (Miles & Huberman, 1984).

Researcher bias also poses a threat to validity in studies employing interview processes. Careful note taking, audio recording of interviews, and detailed transcriptioning were used to limit this validity prospect (Cook & Campbell, 1979).

## CHAPTER IV

### Analyses and Findings

The General Assembly of Virginia employs two methods when enacting legislation. The first method involves the creation of statutes. Statutes are created by the legislature, and have the effect of law, governing the actions, rights, and responsibilities of citizens and organizations. The second method involves the enactments of the legislature, the purpose of which are to regulate the actions and processes of state government and its affiliated agencies and institutions. These enactments are referred to as resolutions. Senate Joint Resolution No. 125, and Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 were enacted by the legislature to regulate the processes of Virginia's public colleges and universities by mandating assessment of student achievement. The creation of "The Guidelines for Student Assessment" was a result of the passage of these two joint resolutions. These enactments and the subsequently developed guidelines provide the focus of the research findings in this chapter.

### Document Analysis

In 1985 Virginia Senator Robert Russell was considering the introduction of legislation that would link student outcomes assessment to institutional funding, similar

to the model advocated by the Southern Region Education Board and used by the state of Tennessee. At the encouragement of Gordon Davies, the Director of SCHEV, Russell's proposal was modified, resulting in the creation and passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 125 (Aper, 1989). The text of Senate Joint Resolution No. 125 appears as Appendix 1. In its final version the Resolution offered that

Virginia historically devotes over seventeen percent of its general funds in the biennial budget to higher education, which amounts to over \$1.3 billion in general funds in the current biennium . . . and various studies have raised questions about curriculum requirements, quality of instruction, and student achievement in the nation's colleges and universities (Senate Joint Resolution No. 125, p. 1).

The resolution called for the establishment of a joint subcommittee composed of members of the House of Delegates' Education Committee and the Senate's Education and Health Committee. The subcommittee's charge was to review with the State Council of Higher Education, state college and university officials, and interested citizens, student achievement in Virginia's public higher education system. Further it called for the investigation of the means by which student achievement may be measured to assure continuing quality of higher education in the Commonwealth (Senate Joint Resolution No. 125). This Joint Resolution lacked any prescriptive measures to be considered by the study group, especially those relating to specific linkages between student

learning and institutional funding, as suggested earlier by Senator Russell. The findings of the subcommittee's investigation were to be reported to the General Assembly the following year.

The subcommittee report, Senate Document No. 14, called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 125, established the framework for Virginia's mandated student outcomes assessment program. Prepared by SCHEV's David Potter, with the assistance of Virginia Commonwealth University faculty member James McMillan, the report was accepted by the 1986 General Assembly (Aper, 1989). The text of Senate Document No. 14 appears as Appendix 2. In this report, a number of recommendations were offered that would "preserve the diverse system of public colleges and universities in Virginia and maintain the Commonwealth's commitment to access and quality in higher education" (Senate Document No. 14, p. 15). These recommendations focused on strengthening the academic relationship between secondary and higher education. It encouraged the establishment of procedures and programs to measure student achievement developed from institutional initiatives consistent with their mission and educational objectives. The document called for the administration of tests to determine the entry-level skills of students. Minimum thresholds of achievement should be established for entry by students into college degree-credit courses. Senate

Document No. 14 addressed remedial education as a means of providing access while improving the quality of students' performance. An advisory committee to the Council of Higher Education was called for to develop guidelines for designing good assessment programs.

Colleges and universities should submit annual reports of progress in developing their assessment programs to the Council of Higher Education. The council should publish results of the assessment programs in its biennial publication of the Virginia Plan for Higher Education (Senate Document No. 14).

The report emphasized that statewide normed testing was not an appropriate option for Virginia, suggesting instead that each institution develop its own approach to assessing student achievement. Senate Document No. 14 was noteworthy in its break with national trends encouraging standardized testing programs as a basis for state-mandated assessment programs (Ewell & Mcdade, 1988). This document signified a departure from prescriptive measures and uniform, system-wide processes.

After review, the General Assembly accepted the report and its recommendations. During the 1986 General Assembly session the legislature enacted Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 accepting the recommendations offered in Senate Document No. 14. The resolution requested that all public colleges and

universities in Virginia "establish programs to measure student achievement" (Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, p. 1). The text of this Resolution can be found as Appendix 3.

With the passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, the legislature had established mandated student outcomes assessment in Virginia. The Resolution called for student achievement to be measured to "assure the citizens of Virginia the continuing high quality of higher education in the Commonwealth" (Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, p. 1). Acceding to the SCHEV recommendations, the enactment encouraged institution-based assessment strategies, calling for concrete, quantifiable information on student achievement and the establishment of standards for student achievement. The legislation did not address standardization of testing or programming, neither did it address funding linkages.

Concurring with SCHEV that the establishment of an advisory committee to "develop guidelines for designing good assessment programs" (Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, p. 1) was appropriate, the General Assembly set in motion the process that would define student outcomes assessment in Virginia's public colleges and universities. In November 1986 SCHEV staff convened this committee, composed of representatives from the University of Virginia, James Madison University, Virginia Military Institute, the College of William and Mary, Virginia State University, George Mason

University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Longwood College, Old Dominion University, Virginia Tech, Northern Virginia Community College, and New River Community College, to develop official guidelines for developing institutional assessment programs called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83. The text of the "Guidelines for Student Assessment" can be found as Appendix 4. Community colleges and senior institutions alike are expected to incorporate each guideline into individual report strategies. The guidelines call for assessment strategies appropriate to the mission of individual institutions. They encourage colleges to focus on absolute measures of student learning, or on the contribution the institution has made to the student's life. The use of varying data forms such as admissions information retention and completion data, job placement, etc., are recommended. The guidelines make provision for institutions to select appropriate nationally available measuring instruments, or to create campus-based measures. Where appropriate, results are to be shared with students. The measurement of all undergraduate programs should occur on a regular schedule.

The guidelines encourage the identification of minimum verbal and quantitative skills below which students will need remediation. An institution is to describe its plan for and its means of measuring the success of remediation. The guidelines recommend that where possible remediation for

students at senior institutions should be arranged through agreements with community colleges. In the area of transfer, senior institutions are called upon to compile data on entering community college students, and distribute the information to the appropriate parties.

Evaluation of assessment procedures should be completed initially and regularly thereafter, ensuring standards of scholarly integrity, and using them for program improvement. Institutional comparison is discouraged as a part of the assessment process. Instead, colleges are called upon to use assessment to improve learning and performance; to evaluate general education, and to assess study majors.

Alumni follow-up studies, identification of skills necessary to do college-degree-credit work, procedures for identifying high-risk students, policies for placement of remedial students, and plans for remediation were to be included initially in the colleges overall assessment strategy and made ready by 1989. The guidelines call for the results to be concrete, more than anecdotal, and presented in quantifiable form (Davies, 1987a).

These guidelines established a common framework to be used by all public colleges and universities as they planned and then reported the assessment of student outcomes "appropriate to the mission of each institution" (Davies, 1987a, p. 1).



The "Guidelines for Student Assessment" is a pivotal document in Virginia higher education's approach to assessing student achievement. The guidelines provide the boundaries within which colleges and universities organize and practice student outcomes assessment. At the same time, each public higher education institution is required to describe its assessment strategies and practices, which are reported in SCHEV's biennial publication entitled The Virginia Plan for Higher Education. Individual community colleges also submit assessment results and findings to the Virginia Community College System where a summary is compiled of all community college assessment activities. This cumulative summary is what actually appears in SCHEV's biennial plan. Fundamental to this required reporting process is strict adherence to the "Guidelines for Student Assessment." The guidelines establish the criteria for the review of each college or university report by SCHEV.

### **Survey Instrument Analysis**

Using theoretical sampling as a guide, 2 purposefully selected groups of study participants, community college assessment practitioners and members of the Virginia General Assembly, were identified based upon their knowledge of and experience with Virginia's mandated student outcomes assessment program. A preliminary survey instrument was

created using the "Guidelines for Student Assessment" as the primary source for developing survey questions. After the instrument was pilot tested, and suggestions, ideas, and changes were incorporated, the survey was administered to the selected participants.

The responses were analyzed using the Chi Square test of independence. Examination of the aggregate responses assisted in identifying broad, general perceptions from the subject groups and in establishing points of agreement and/or disagreement between the cohorts. Campbell (1978) asserts that surveys have the potential to pinpoint quickly areas that should be addressed more specifically by follow-up research. He goes on to explain that the use of quantitative strategies followed by a qualitative strategy serves to provide for strengthened qualitative research. The analysis conducted on the survey responses assisted in the creation of the schedule of inquiry to be used during the succeeding interview phase of the study.

The survey instrument, composed of 15 questions, allowed for fixed-alternative responses with space for comments. Fixed alternative survey items have the advantage of achieving greater uniformity of measurement and thus greater reliability. The disadvantage is their superficiality. This, however, was remedied by probing beneath the response surface during the interview phase of the study (Kerlinger, 1964).

The questions were derived generally from review of Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 and specifically from the resulting "Guidelines for Student Outcomes." The survey instruments, with accompanying cover letters and copies of Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 and the "Guidelines for Student Assessment," were administered to both participant groups. Cover letters and the text of the survey instrument are found as Appendix 5 and Appendix 6. The return rate from both sample groups was 100 percent.

Use of the Chi Square statistical test (with an alpha level set at .05) allowed for a more conservative approach in arriving at conclusions drawn after analyzing the collected data. To ensure even greater consistency in reviewing the data, Yates' Corrected Chi Square was employed. The application of these statistical approaches reduced the risk associated with cursory observation of the data that could prove misleading in determining significant differences in proportion of responses.

The sample size of the study did influence the statistical results. This was especially evident in analyzing several survey questions in which computed differences proved statistically not significant. However, significant percentage differences were observed between legislator and practitioner responses.

These statistical results, as well as the practical results observed from this quantitative analysis, were used in guiding questions during the interview portion of the study.

### Survey Findings

#### Survey Question 1

**Do you believe that the strategy used in assessing undergraduate student achievement should be determined by each community college in Virginia, "appropriate to its individual mission?"**

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment" (Appendix 4), Guideline 1.

Table 1

#### Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	5	(42)	11	(100)
No	7	(58)	0	(0)

Chi Square = 9.224, DF = 1, P = .002

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = 1.166, DF = 1, P = .2

As displayed in Table 1, based on the Chi Square statistics the null hypothesis was rejected. There exists a statistical difference between the responses of the legislators and practitioners regarding question 1. The analysis of the responses to this question served as a guide in developing the initial interview question with the legislative group.

#### Survey Question 2

**Do you believe that the assessment of undergraduate student achievement should be determined by a standard testing program implemented across all Virginia community colleges?**

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guidelines 1 and 2.

Table 2

#### Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	7	(58)	3	(27)
No	5	(42)	8	(73)

Chi Square = 2.253, DF = 1, P = .133

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = 1.166, DF = 1, P = .280

Chi Square analysis in Table 2 demonstrated that no statistical difference existed between the groups. However, the percentage differences that were exhibited between and among the groups encouraged further investigation. Using these quantitative results and information gleaned from Senate Document No. 14, interview questions regarding the use of standardized testing across community colleges were developed and administered to both the practitioner and legislative participants.

## Survey Question 3

**Do you believe that Virginia's citizenry is properly informed as to the quality of the community college education in the Commonwealth?**

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guidelines 7 and 8, Senate Document No. 14, and Senate Joint Resolution No. 83.

Table 3

Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	2	(17)	2	(18)
No	10	(83)	9	(82)

Chi Square = .009, DF = 1, P = .924

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = .000, DF = 1, P = 1.00

Analysis of Chi Square produced no statistically significant differences. However, the similarity of response sets and the emphasis placed on the reporting of assessment results in Senate Document No. 14, Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, and the "Guidelines for Student Assessment" encouraged further investigation. Interview questions relating to the

communication of assessment results to the public were devised and administered to both participant groups.

Survey Question 4

Are "admissions information, retention and completion data, alumni follow-up studies, job placement data, information on licensing and certification examinations, accreditation reports, studies of transfer students, etc., important in determining student achievement for community college students"?

This question was drawn from the "Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guideline 2.

Table 4

Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	10	(83)	11	(100)
No	2	(17)	0	(0)

Chi Square = 2.008, DF = 1, P = .156

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = .457, DF = 1, P = .499



The quantitative findings in Table 4 and responses supplied in the comments section of the survey item indicated general agreement between and among both groups. Because of these factors it was determined that further investigation was unnecessary.

#### Survey Question 5

**Do you believe that Virginia's community college students are being appropriately assessed in general education?**

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guideline 4

Table 5

#### Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	6	(50)	2	(18)
No	6	(50)	9	(82)

Chi Square = 2.561, DF = 1, P = .110

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = 1.351, DF = 1, P = .245

The Chi Square analysis produced no statistically significant differences between the groups. Observation of

the percentage differences among and between the participants indicated that further study of general education assessment was warranted. Interview questions were developed and administered to both the practitioners and the legislators.

#### Survey Question 6

**Do you believe that Virginia's community college students are being appropriately assessed in their selected majors?**

This question was drawn from the "Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guideline 4.

Table 6

#### Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	7	(58)	8	(73)
No	5	(42)	3	(27)

Chi Square = .524, DF = 1, P = .469

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = .082, DF = 1, P = .775

The quantitative findings in Table 6 and responses supplied in the comments section of the survey item indicated general agreement between and among both groups. Typical

comments accompanying "no" responses reflected similar viewpoints found in question 5 concerning general education. These perspectives were addressed in the interview question developed around the issue of assessment of general education. Because of these factors it was determined that further investigation was unnecessary.

#### Survey Question 7

**Do you believe that Virginia's community colleges are effective in assessing the placement of entering students into degree-credit work?**

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guideline 5.

Table 7

#### Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	10	(83)	9	(82)
No	2	(17)	2	(18)

Chi Square = .009, DF = 1, P = .924

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = .000, DF = 1, P = 1.00

The quantitative findings in Table 7 and responses supplied in the comments section of the survey item indicated general agreement between and among both groups. Because of these factors it was determined that further investigation was unnecessary.

#### Survey Question 8

**Do you believe that Virginia's community colleges have demonstrated success in dealing with students having been diagnosed as in need of remediation?**

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guideline 6.

Table 8

#### Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	10	(83)	8	(73)
No	2	(17)	3	(27)

Chi Square = .379, DF = 1, P = .538

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = .012, DF = 1, P = .912

The quantitative findings in Table 8 and responses supplied in the comments section of the survey item indicated general agreement between and among both groups. Because of these factors it was determined that further investigation was unnecessary.

## Survey Question 9

Do you believe the process of providing "progress reports on all full-time, first-year students who received high school diplomas in Virginia during the prior year, containing information such as retention, grade point average, and whether students are taking remedial coursework" is important in assessing student achievement in Virginia's community colleges?

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guideline 7.

Table 9

Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	10	(83)	11	(100)
No	2	(17)	0	(0)

Chi Square = 2.008, DF = 1, P = .156

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = .457, DF = 1, P = .499

The quantitative findings in Table 9 and responses supplied in the comments section of the survey item indicated general agreement between and among both groups. Because of

these factors it was determined that further investigation was unnecessary.

Survey Question 10

**Do you believe that a similar process of providing progress reports on transfer students, including "graduation information and the number of credits transferred," is important in assessing student achievement in Virginia's community colleges?**

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guideline 8

Table 10

Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	12	(100)	11	(100)
No	0	(0)	0	(0)

Chi Square = .043, DF = 1, P = .835

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = .000, DF = 1, P = 1.00

The findings exhibited in Table 10 indicate complete congruence of belief concerning this survey question. Further

investigation during the interview phase was determined to be unnecessary.

Survey Question 11

Do you believe that community colleges in Virginia are consistently "insuring that their assessment procedures meet standards for scholarly integrity, are compatible with the institutional mission and program goals, and are useful for program improvement?"

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guideline 9.

Table 11

Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	8	(67)	9	(82)
No	4	(33)	2	(18)

Chi Square = .683, DF = 1, P = .408

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = .123, DF = 1, P = .725

Analysis of Chi Square produced no statistically significant differences between the groups. However, the



similarity of response sets and the emphasis in the literature on program improvement as a significant objective of the assessment process throughout the related literature encouraged further investigation with the practitioner group during the interview phase.

## Survey Question 12

**Do you believe that Virginia's assessment should be used to compare the effectiveness and overall quality of one community college with another?**

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guideline 10, and Senate Document No. 14.

Table 12

Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	6	(50)	2	(18)
No	6	(50)	9	(82)

Chi Square = 2.56, DF = 1, P = .110

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = 1.351, DF = 1, P = .245

Chi Square analysis as exhibited in Table 12 demonstrated that no statistical difference existed between the groups. However, the percentage differences that were found to exist between and among the groups encouraged further investigation. Using these quantitative results and information gleaned from Senate Document No. 14, interview questions regarding assessment and institutional comparison were developed and

administered to both the practitioner and legislative participants.

Survey Question 13

**Do you believe that assessment should be used to help make decisions to terminate unproductive or poor quality academic programs in community colleges?**

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Guidelines 9 and 10.

Table 13

Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	9	(75)	6	(55)
No	3	(25)	5	(45)

Chi Square = 1.059, DF = 1, P = .304

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = .349, DF = 1, P = .555

Analysis of Chi Square in Table 13 produced no statistically significant differences between the groups. However, the variation in percentages among the groups and the assertion made in related literature that assessment results

should not be used punitively encouraged further investigation. An interview question relating to the relationship of assessment results to the future of academic programs was administered to both the practitioner and legislative groups.

#### Survey Question 14

**Do you believe that assessment results should be a factor in determining general fund support to individual community colleges?**

This question was drawn from the review of related assessment literature.

Table 14

#### Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	7	(58)	3	(27)
No	5	(42)	8	(73)

Chi Square = 2.253, DF = 1, P = .133

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = 1.166, DF = 1, P = .280

Chi Square analysis as exhibited in Table 14 demonstrated that no statistical difference existed between the groups. However, the percentage differences that were found to exist between and among the groups encouraged further investigation. Using these quantitative results and information gleaned from related literature regarding the linkage of assessment results to base budget funding, an interview question regarding assessment and general fund appropriations was asked of the legislative participants.

Survey Question 15.

**Seven years after passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, do you believe that Virginia's assessment of student achievement has succeeded in assuring quality in Virginia's community colleges?**

This question was drawn from "The Guidelines for Student Assessment", Senate Joint Resolution 125, Senate Document No. 14, and Senate Joint Resolution No. 83.

Table 15

Survey Responses

	Legislators	(%)	Practitioners	(%)
Yes	9	(75)	6	(55)
No	3	(25)	5	(45)

Chi Square = 1.059, DF = 1, P = .304

Yates' Corrected Chi Square = .340, DF = 1, P = .555

Chi Square analysis exhibited in Table 15 indicated that no statistically significant differences existed between the groups. The large percentage of practitioner respondents who answered "no" to this question encouraged further investigation into their belief regarding this quality issue.

An interview question regarding the success of the assessment program in Virginia assuring quality in the Commonwealth's community colleges was pursued with the practitioners.

### **Interview Findings**

Using information and specific data gleaned from the analyses of legislative and regulatory documents and the survey instrument, certain findings emerged that were incorporated into the development of interview questions pursued with each subject groups. The responses to the interview questions were analyzed to identify emerging themes. Morris Opler defined a theme as "a postulate or position, declared or implied and usually controlling behavior or stimulating activity, which is tacitly approved or openly promoted" (Opler, 1945, p. 198). A theme functions as a cognitive principle that guides behavior and usually takes the form of an assertion or belief (Spradley, 1980). The discovery of these cognitive principles created the framework for addressing the research questions.

In-depth interviews were scheduled with 12 members of the General Assembly, 6 from the House of Delegates and 6 from the Senate. These participants were purposefully selected because of their service on their respective Education Committees in 1986, when Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 was enacted, and their current service on those committees.

Table 16

Composite Demographics of Legislative Study Participants

Mean Years/Elective Service	Mean Years/Committee Service
19.5	18.6
Political Affiliation	
Democrat 10	Republican 2

The regions of the Commonwealth represented by these legislative participants were, Tidewater, Northern Virginia, Central Virginia, Southside Virginia and the western part of the state.

The interviews took place in each legislator's office, located in the General Assembly Building, Richmond, Virginia. Each participant agreed to the use of tape recordings and was informed that a written transcript of the interview would be produced from the tapes. All structured interview questions were administered to each participant, with appropriate follow-up questions employed to probe certain responses in more detail. The structured interview guide administered to the legislators can be found as Appendix 8.

The interview tapes are being retained by the researcher.



**Research Question**

The first research question addressed in the interview phase of the study was, **Do legislators believe that the assessment guidelines, called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, have been satisfactorily implemented in Virginia's community colleges?**

Each of the succeeding interview questions were formulated from a synthesis of the findings accruing from the survey instrument (Appendix 7) administered to all selected legislative participants. Also, analysis of formal legislative and regulatory documents were used in the formulation of interview questions.

Transcripts of interviews were analyzed for common belief patterns. An a priori decision was made that three focus thematic statements would be needed to declare a theme pattern. Each figure presents the number of common themes, actual quotes of the research subjects, and the researcher's discerned theme pattern. Additional findings are presented that were germane but not sufficient to justify aggregation.

Interview question 1 was asked of the legislators:  
 58 percent of the legislative respondents believe that there should be a common strategy used among all community colleges in assessing student achievement. Can you explain this position in light of the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia's assertion that approaches to student assessment should be developed by each college appropriate to its individual mission?

N	LEGISLATOR RESPONSES	THEMES
4	"As legislators, we want to look at some over-all strategy."	Coordinated, unified strategy
	"There is the perception out there that we are not coordinated in our efforts."	
	"I think the overall program ought to be unified."	
	"I think we would like to see some kind of uniformity."	
5	"We have to have some commonality of goals and objectives."	Common purpose and direction
	"We need some common denominator."	
	"There should be commonality there across all disciplines."	
	"We have to have some common achievement goal."	
	"There should be commonality of assessments there that we should have a certain level . . . a high level."	

Figure 1: Legislative Response Summary For Interview Question 1

A consistent pattern as shown in Figure 1 emerged from the legislative responses. This pattern indicated a general belief that common outcomes assessment strategy employed across all colleges in the Commonwealth would be preferable to

the assertion in Guideline 1 that assessment plans should be appropriate to the mission of each institution.

There were legislators in addition to those referenced in Figure 1 that concurred with the guideline recommendation that each institutions devise assessment strategies appropriate to their individual missions. S-3 summed up this perspective when he stated, ". . . the State Council on Higher Education has recognized, shall we say, the differences in make-up of local, regional interest . . . that needs to be maintained."

The second interview question posed to the legislative respondents related to the use of standardized testing across community colleges in Virginia.

Similarly, 58 percent of the legislative participants believe that student achievement should be determined by a standardized testing program administered across all community colleges. Why would you concur or differ with this position?

N	LEGISLATOR RESPONSES	THEMES
3	"I concur . . . that people want to know that certain basic level of education training, proficiency in whatever the discipline".	Minimum level of performance, baselines
	"I think you need a standard . . . some way to evaluate all colleges . . . to see what the track record is."	
	"You have to have something that is common to be used as a baseline."	
3	"The results of standard testing might say, Is our institution better?, and that would become a benchmark for others to try to achieve"	Benchmarking
	"This goes back to the idea of trying to get some sort of benchmark for how their students are doing."	
	". . . I don't think there would be any harm to have generalized bench marks kinds of testing."	

Figure 2: Legislative Response Summary For Interview Question 2

Themes that emerged from legislative responses to this question as exhibited in Figure 2 relate to minimum baseline levels of proficiency across community colleges, and a theme borrowed from the business world, benchmarking. The

latter would allow for common points of measuring achievement and productivity.

Other legislative respondents did not agree with the use of standardized testing across community colleges. D-1 and S-5 cited the "individuality" of community colleges while D-5 cited "differing missions" in expressing their opposition.

The third interview question administered to the legislative respondents was:

83 percent of the respondents believe that Virginia's citizenry is not being properly informed as to the quality of community college education. Could you offer possible reasons why such a large percentage of legislators would take that position?

N	LEGISLATOR RESPONSES	THEMES
6	"I think that is based on the fact that it is just among a whole range of things that the citizenry would be concerned about that doesn't rank very high on their list."	Public apathy and disinterest
	". . . but I don't think the public realizes that . . . the public doesn't realize positive things; they are more prone to recognize the negative things."	
	". . . the apathy of the general population. There are not too many of our citizens that have a great deal of concern about the quality."	
	". . . it would not be a harm at all if for instance they would have public hearings . . . to invite the public to come and see what is happening."	
	"I think in general, the public doesn't know much about anything that goes on . . . anything that effects them ... personally is what they consider."	
	"I think a lot of the public have not taken the time to consider . . . the community college."	

Figure 3: Legislative Response Summary for Interview Question 3

As Figure 3 exhibits, most legislators felt that public apathy presented an important hurdle to effectively communicating assessment results to the citizenry.

There were legislators such D-5 that offered that "higher education had not been properly defined" and most people "have a difficult time understanding what higher education is like." D-3 and D-4 felt that the communication of assessment results was adequate.

Pressed to assign responsibility for the communication or lack of communication of assessment results, most interviewees felt that the State Council of Higher Education and/or the State Board for Community Colleges should be more assertive and systematic. Still others felt that since assessment practices were being devised by individual colleges, they should devise means for greater exposure of student achievement results to the public. S-5 stated, "I think individual colleges should be more responsible. I don't even think alumni of the individual colleges know the changes and how they have improved."

The fourth interview question posed to the legislative group was:

Half of the legislative respondents indicated a belief that Virginia's community college students were not being properly assessed in general education. What factors, or perspectives might contribute to this belief?

N	LEGISLATOR RESPONSES	THEMES
3	"I think it is a lack of understanding . . . assessing general education is probably just reacting."	Inconsistent understanding of general education
	"I just don't understand what general education is."	
	". . . too many people ask how do you really get a good general education."	
3	". . . in today's elementary and secondary education, some of those folks are coming to the community college with not the biggest capabilities of those basic learnings."	General education as a fundamental thread running through the educational system
	"I think that assessment of basic skills needed to advance in a particular discipline is the concern. If they don't have the basic skills, they are not going to get very far."	
	". . . there is a lot of development assessment in the community colleges that you don't see in the four year schools . . . if you are weak in those areas - math, reading, and writing in particular--they insist that you start out with those."	

Figure 4: Legislative Response Summary for Interview Question 4

Figure 4 illustrates two themes that were emphasized throughout the interviews. The interviewees viewed general education as fundamental to determining whether an individual student was receiving a basic education. Most of the respondents offered that general education assessment was the



common thread that ran through and linked secondary, community college, and senior institution education. Yet 50 percent indicated that they believed that Virginia's community college students were not being properly assessed in the general education area.

Even though every legislator except one gave serious consideration to the matter of general education assessment, each expressed some uncertainty about what exactly general education is, and, therefore, how it might be assessed.

D-1 viewed general education as "math, reading, and writing, . . . and because there were so many students involved in these courses, there wasn't sufficient time to make better assessments." S-5 responded, "I don't know a single legislator who is even qualified to address the issue of general education assessment."

Interview question 5 asked the legislators to respond to the following:

50 percent of the questionnaire respondents believe that assessment results should be used to compare the effectiveness and overall quality of one community college with another. In your opinion how might this type of comparison prove beneficial? Or, how might it prove disadvantageous?

N	LEGISLATOR RESPONSES	THEMES
5	"It seems to me that there would be some value in comparisons . . . it could help you positively evaluate some things."	Comparison should be non-punitive and incentive based
	". . . it could be done in such a way that it would result in constructive improvement."	
	". . . you might end up getting more money . . . through some incentives."	
	". . . that might bring about a competitive spirit that would be good for the system . . . it might keep the presidents' of the community colleges feet to the fire and spark them."	
	"I don't have any problem with that, and it certainly could be a wonderful tool . . . it would benefit schools to take notes and compare notes."	

Figure 5: Legislative Response Summary For Interview Question 5

Figure 5 exhibits the various considerations of legislators toward use of assessment results to compare institutions. Respondents felt that using assessment results to compare one community college with another could be useful but not for punitive purposes. The sentiment among

participants was that it would be difficult to make institutional comparisons because of the diversity and heterogony that defines the community college system.

Interview question 6 was asked as follows:

Three-fourths of respondents believe that assessment results should be used to help make decisions to terminate unproductive or poor quality programs. Why would this position surface in the face of literature and research that discourages the perception of assessment as a punitive process; that encourages the use of assessment results to improve and enhance education?

N	LEGISLATOR RESPONSES	THEMES
6	<p>"Programs need to be addressed, obviously, if the school is going to be relevant and keep changing . . . that is always part of the administrative process."</p> <p>"That seems to me to be a normal management skill . . . something each college would do."</p> <p>"We shouldn't even need assessment to terminate those programs for which there is not sufficient demand or for which we are not serving the taxpayers."</p> <p>"Colleges should always be looking at their programs from a point of demand."</p> <p>". . . that's something for the administration to work out as to how they are going to use assessment."</p> <p>". . . colleges do not take steps to eliminate programs that are antiquated."</p>	Assessment and management practices
3	<p>". . . anytime you are trying to decide whether to fund or continue funding . . . good arguments are going to be made."</p> <p>". . . from a financial standpoint they look at programs to terminate because there is only so much money to go around."</p> <p>". . . they are trying to look at ways to downsize the operation, thinking they are saving money."</p>	Assessment and economic decisions

Figure 6: Legislative Response Summary for Interview Question 6

Figure 6 exhibits that legislators felt that outcomes assessment can be an important tool in addressing administrative and economic decisions relative to academic programming. Even though not included in Figure 6, D-5 commented that "the purpose of assessment is to look at quality."

Still, there were a few legislators who felt that until there was some uniform approach established, assessment should not be used to determine program continuance. S-4 summarized this belief by asserting,

I am not confident that the assessment mechanism is very well defined. My impression is that it goes all over the board in the way it is done and the way it is carried out, and the way the results are tabulated and conclusions are derived.

Legislative interview question 7 asked:

58 percent of the legislative respondents indicated that assessment results should be a factor in determining general fund appropriations to community colleges. What might be some criteria or approaches to be met before this could be implemented?

N	LEGISLATOR RESPONSES	THEMES
6	"We should reward those that have outstanding performance as incentive to get the others to seek the rewards . . . they should be rewarded for quality work."	Assessment linked to budgets through special funding allocations
	". . . assessment is good if it allows, when money is tight, that we make sure that every dollar is spent well."	
	". . . assessment is a very important tool in determining specific institutional budget needs."	
	". . . in dealing with where the money goes, we are advocates for what we want . . . if you have facts in your case . . . you are going to emphasize those for funding."	
	". . . if you have the assessment program as a pretest, and you found that sixty percent of your students were below the reading level, then perhaps money should go into remedial programs."	
	" assessment should be a factor in appropriating funds . . . I don't think it should be a predominant one."	

Figure 7: Legislative Response Summary for Interview Question 7

Figure 7 illustrates the consensus belief of the legislative participants that using specific assessment results might be useful to the individual institutions in garnering specified allocations. S-5 stated that "indeed, I

absolutely do not agree with that." And S-4 stated, "I don't agree with that. I just don't agree with that." D-3 argued that "I don't think the legislature should get into a rating posture of community colleges, one against another."

The final interview question posed to the legislative participants was:

If you and the other members of the General Assembly were to revisit the assessment mandate now employed across Virginia's public higher education, what changes or additions would you like to see addressed for the future?

N	LEGISLATOR RESPONSES	THEMES
4	"I can think of one thing . . . to really gear a strong two-year program that would be accepted at a four-year institution."	Assessment and inter-college transfer
	"Number one, transfer agreements . . . there is no point in going to a community college if four-year institutions don't readily accept the students that are being transferred."	
	"I feel that one area where we could be supportive is . . . encouraging an articulation process."	
	"I think I would put emphasis on the transfer system which in turn beefs up your system altogether."	

Figure 8: Legislative Response Summary for Interview Question 8

Figure 8 illustrates a pattern of concern over the relationship of assessment to the college transfer process in Virginia. The transfer of students and academic credits between public institutions should be an important consideration in Virginia's assessment program.

The answer to the research question, Do legislators believe that the assessment guidelines, called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 have been satisfactorily implemented in Virginia's community colleges?, is addressed in the synthesis of the survey results and the thematic patterns accruing from the interviews with selected members of the Virginia General Assembly.

The interview phase of the study produced the following thematic findings:

Relating to Guideline 1 (Appendix 4), legislators believe that a common assessment approach employed across all community colleges would bring about a coordinated, unified strategy and allow for a common purpose and direction.

Relating to Guidelines 1 and 2 (Appendix 4), legislators believe that standardized testing would allow for minimum levels of performance and create baseline limits. Standardized testing across community colleges would also provide benchmarking which could be used for comparative purposes.

Relating to Guidelines 7 and 8 (Appendix 4), legislators believe that the primary hurdle to overcome in communicating assessment results to the citizenry is public apathy and disinterest.



Relating to Guideline 4 (Appendix 4), legislators believe that general education is the fundamental thread running through Virginia's education system. Community college students are not being properly assessed in general education because of inconsistent understanding of general education.

Relating to Guideline 10 (Appendix 4), legislators believe that assessment should be used to compare the effectiveness and overall quality of one community college with another. This comparison should be non-punitive and incentive based.

Relating to Guidelines 9 and 10 (Appendix 4), legislators believe that assessment should help make decisions to terminate unproductive or poor quality programs. The legislators linked assessment with standard management practices and economic decision making.

Legislators were opposed generally to linking assessment to base budget appropriations. However, a theme that emerged was that a linkage may prove beneficial in special funding instances where reward is merited, or need is demonstrated.

An important theme to emerge as legislators considered the future of assessment in Virginia was that a closer relationship between assessment and college transfer must be realized.

Through synthesis of findings accruing from the quantitative portion of the study legislators exhibited the following beliefs:

Regarding Guideline 2 (Appendix 4), legislators believe that admission information, retention and completion data, alumni follow-up studies, job placement data, licensure and certification information, accreditation reports, and studies of student transfer were important elements in assessing student achievement in Virginia's community colleges.

Concerning Guideline 4 (Appendix 4), legislators believe that students are being appropriately assessed in selected majors. Relating to Guideline 6 (Appendix 4), legislators believe that community colleges are effective in the assessment of students who have been diagnosed as in need of remediation, there was congruence.

There was even stronger agreement among the legislators concerning Guideline 5 (Appendix 4), relative to the effectiveness of community colleges in assessing the placement of entering students into degree-credit work.

The "Guidelines for Student Assessment" calls for the provision of progress reports on first-year students who received diplomas in Virginia during the prior year and on transfer students. The legislators concurred strongly relative

to Guideline 7 (Appendix 4) on the importance of these reports to the student outcomes assessment program in Virginia.

### **Research Question**

The second research question addressed in the interview phase of the study was, **Do practitioners at the local community college believe that the assessment guidelines, as called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, have been satisfactorily implemented in Virginia's community colleges?**

Each of the succeeding interview questions were formulated from a synthesis of the findings accruing from the survey instrument (Appendix 7) administered to all selected community college assessment practitioners. Also, analysis of formal legislative and regulatory documents were used in the formulation of interview questions.

In-depth interviews were scheduled with 11 community college assessment practitioners. These participants were chosen because of their knowledge of and experience with Virginia's mandated student outcomes assessment program, called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, and prescribed in the "Guidelines for Student Assessment."

Table 17

Composite Demographics of Practitioner Study Participants

Mean Years/College Service	Mean Years/Assessment
14.9	4.2
Service Time Committed to Assessment	
Partial 9	Full 2

The institutional sizes, as indicated by full-time equivalent student populations, represented in this study ranged from Category I/Less than 1500 FTES to Category III/2500-4999 FTES. Geographical representation included Southside Virginia, Central Virginia, Western Virginia, and the southwestern region of the state.

The interviews took place on the campus of each practitioner. Each participant agreed to the use of tape recordings and was informed that a written transcript of the interview would be produced from the tapes. All structured interview questions were administered to each participant, with certain follow-up questions employed to probe certain responses in more detail. The structured interview guide

administered to the practitioners can be found as Appendix 9. The interview tapes are being retained by the researcher.

Transcripts of interviews were analyzed for common belief patterns. An a priori decision was made that three focus thematic statements would be needed to declare a pattern. Each figure presents actual quotes of the research subjects, and the researcher's discerned thematic patterns. Additional comments are presented following the figure that were germane but not sufficient to justify aggregation.

The first interview question administered to the practitioners was:

Close to a third of the questionnaire respondents indicated a belief that standardized testing should be implemented across the community college system for assessment purposes. What benefit, if any, do you see in this approach?

N	PRACTITIONER RESPONSES	THEMES
4	"Individual mission is something that must be maintained . . . standardized testing could threaten our identity."	Standardized testing as a threat to institutional diversity
	"All colleges are different . . . I really have trouble with a standardized."	
	". . . there is a real danger in comparing institutions on the basis of standardized tests."	
	". . . a practical concern is that it would be difficult to get hundreds of faculty to agree on what's the best test to use."	
4	"It allows us to compare our results with much larger groups."	Standardized testing as a tool of comparison
	"I support that . . . having statewide norms that could be compared to national norms."	
	". . . one benefit is that you can compare yourself to national norms."	
	"I think it would give us some good data to compare our student outcomes with some of the other schools."	

Figure 9: Practitioner Response Summary for Interview Question 1

Figure 9 demonstrates a dichotomy of belief among the practitioners on the use of standardized testing. Contrary to the data collected from the questionnaire, as many interview respondents supported the use of this type of measurement as

opposed it. Opposition centered on the threat presented by standardization to institutional diversity and difference. Support focused on the value of standardized testing in producing reliable valid measures of student outcomes that can be compared to national norms.

The second interview question addressed by the community college practitioners was:

82 percent of the questionnaire respondents believed that Virginia's citizenry was not being properly informed as to the quality of community college education. Could you cite reasons why this belief is held so strongly?

N	PRACTITIONER RESPONSES	THEMES
6	" . . . we have trouble packaging the assessment results in a way that can be cleanly communicated."	Absence of uniformity and consistency in reporting assessment practices and results
	" . . . it's a hard thing to communicate . . . folks don't understand assessment so its difficult to write something up that will make sense."	
	" . . . so we are looking at this data and saying this is what the public is going to see and that's really not the way it is."	
	"Unfortunately, what the public is seeing is not consistent and that presents problems."	
	" . . . it is difficult, even at a university, to come to terms with standards and courses and requirements."	
	"I think we are not informing them because of the sophistication of the activity that we call student assessment."	

Figure 10: Practitioner Response Summary for Interview Question 2

Figure 10 reveals a consensus of belief among practitioners that the communication of assessment results to the citizenry of the Commonwealth was a significant shortcoming of Virginia's assessment program. P-H focused on what he referred to as the "objectivity problem" that inhibits colleges from disclosing assessment results. He stated that in the assessment process

You're going to find problems; you're going to find weak areas that need to be strengthened, and there's a reluctance to air your dirty linen in public. I think it is a two-edged sword. If you're going to go public with your assessment work, you have to be prepared to go public with the bad as well as the good. Colleges are generally reluctant to do that.



The third question posed to the practitioner had to do with general education assessment; it asked:

Over three-fourths of the practitioner respondents believed that Virginia's community college students were not being properly assessed in general education. Why might this belief exist so strongly? What might be some appropriate assessment strategies applied to general education? What should be avoided?

N	PRACTITIONER RESPONSES	THEMES
4	"General education by its very nature is broad and difficult to define in cleanly measurable ways. "	Vagueness and inconsistencies associated with general education assessment
	" . . . general education is vague . . . abstract."	
	"Understanding culture and society . . . all those things are difficult to measure."	
	" . . . nobody can agree on what general education is . . . in some ways it's a kind of value added thing and is not assessed in terms of absolute competencies."	
	" . . . the objectives of general education are so nebulous."	

Figure 11: Practitioner Response Summary for Interview Question 3

Figure 11 illustrates the perplexities that frame the relationship of assessment and general education. General education assessment emerged as an important theme among practitioners. Why it is significant is summed up by P-H,

General education is at the core of the undergraduate experience, so whatever is working or not working, or is good or bad relative to that

experience, seems to be centered around general education.

Figure 12 exhibits the responses to practitioner sub-question,

What might be some appropriate assessment strategies applied to general education?

N	PRACTITIONER RESPONSES	THEMES
4	" . . . general education is best assessed using nationally normed measurements."	The importance of standards in general education assessment
	"We all rely on standardized tests for that because we don't know what else to do."	
	" . . . to measure general education we must test all of the students when they come in and test them when they go out and have a reasonable way to nationally norm this."	
	"Personally, I like standardized test and recommend them to people."	

Figure 12: Practitioner Response Summary for Sub-question 1

Interestingly, a similar number of respondents to those cited in Figure 12 dismissed the benefits of standardized testing in assessing general education outcomes when they responded to sub-question 3, What should be avoided?

Practitioners cited the Report of the General Education Task Force (1990), created by the Virginia Community College System, as an important effort at reviewing principles associated with general education. The report identifies eight elements "that embody the essence of general education, those being; communication, learning skills, critical thinking

skills, and human relations, computational and computer skills, understanding science and technology, and wellness" (Virginia Community System, 1990, p. 7). As important as this effort was at addressing the context of definition and composition of general education, it fell short in the context of assessment. The practitioners offered that a number of the elements could be assessed using multiple measurements, but others could not be assessed adequately, or in any uniform manner.

Interview question 4 was asked of the practitioner respondents:

A modest number of respondents felt that assessment procedures were not addressing scholarly integrity, and were not useful for program improvement. What factors might contribute to this position?

N	PRACTITIONER RESPONSES	THEMES
7	"We are not at the point of improving programs based on results."	Program improvement; process or results
	"... there is no reason to do assessment if you are not going to bring about change."	
	"... I think we have focused on producing data . . . we haven't focused on the follow-up."	
	"... we look at tables and descriptive statistics . . . when you get it and you ask what does it mean?"	
	"We have not completed the process to the point where we have legitimate results . . . tied to program improvement."	
	"... any device that the faculty is comfortable with, that gives them meaningful data . . . to make changes in programs is valid."	
	"... I think assessment results are not being used for program improvement."	
4	"There is nothing scholarly about it. They want results every year . . . they want us to crank out stuff."	Scholarly integrity, content or results
	"... the integrity of the course . . . we have to prepare students for transfer . . . and to be successful when they get there."	
	"I think assessment can be used to promote the integrity of courses . . . and scholarly effort . . . but I'm not sure that's a mandate we are using right now."	
	"... a lot of people feel like a grade that the student receives is the way their course ought to be assessed. Assessing anything other than that may be, in their opinion, a mistrust of integrity."	

Figure 13: Practitioner Response Summary for Interview Question 4

Figure 13 points to inconsistent interpretation of the purpose and role of outcomes assessment in maintaining scholarly integrity and program improvement. These inconsistencies were highlighted further by P-B when she stated, "It has been my experience working with faculty that they have difficulty even conceptualizing an appropriate strategy to do program assessment." Similarly P-C said,

The assessment process itself is not held in very high esteem. . . . It receives interference all the time from faculty. Therefore, I think the results of it probably in most schools are not being used for program improvement.

There was the assertion from some participants that there was consistency in the outcomes assessment process, especially in the area of program improvement. P-E stated, "I feel like our program review process is the strongest thing we have as far as assessment." P-J argued that "I think one of the easier things to assess are programs. . . . It is becoming easier to evaluate, easier to determine where weaknesses in programs might be."

Relating to the assessment process and scholarly integrity, P-F stated that "we are so pressed to implement the assessment program . . . through reporting form that we can't attend to those elements that would address scholarly integrity."

Interview question 5 asked:

All but two of the questionnaire respondents indicated that assessment results should not be used to compare the effectiveness and quality of one community college with another. Why might such a strong belief exist in this context?

N	PRACTITIONER RESPONSES	THEMES
6	" . . . we are serving unique communities, and we are not really in competition, and we don't need to create artificial competition."	Consideration of diversity and difference in using assessment results for institutional comparison
	"Colleges that are so small . . . simply do not have the resources that the larger schools have . . . if we started comparing results across the board, the schools that don't have the resources . . . would suffer."	
	" . . . I saw folks comparing their college to other colleges, and I was amazed . . . there was no criteria . . . because different places do different things, it's just not working."	
	" . . .all community colleges are different . . . you have different types of students."	
	"You would have to assume that the missions and goals are the same . . . to compare them on that basis . . . we know that they are not."	
	" . . . nothing will kill faculty interest in assessment quicker than feeling this it is a tool or a gun that can be held to their heads."	

Figure 14: Practitioner Response Summary for Interview Question 5

Figure 14 highlights practitioner concern that institutional comparison using assessment data is both threatening and fraught with inconsistencies. P-D summarized

this belief in stating, "I have been indoctrinated to think that we are all accountable." But because of the differences associated with institutional mission and objectives, comparisons would not be a reliable measure of accountability.

P-K stated, "I don't see anything wrong with that. I think that it is inevitable. Once you begin assessing students, it is very hard not to compare them and say that one is doing better than another." P-J offered that where professional licensure is concerned, "the use of assessment results, such as in allied health fields, are for individual and group comparison."

Interview question 6 asked of the practitioners:

Fully 55 percent of the respondents felt that assessment results should be used to help make decisions to terminate unproductive, or poor quality programs. Why would this belief surface in the face of literature and research that discourages the use of assessment as a punitive process; that encourages the use of assessment results to improve and enhance education?

N	PRACTITIONER RESPONSES	THEMES
6	"Meaningful assessment must go beyond numbers if it's to measure a program's success in achieving its goals and objectives."	Program assessment in terms of continuous improvement versus quantifiable results
	". . . because I do not consider graduation rates to be an assessment outcome in any way . . . graduation is an artificial construct."	
	"The assessment report is our opportunity to say . . . this is a weak area and this is what we are going to do to strengthen it . . . those decisions should be made locally, not at the state level."	
	". . . assessment is for improvement . . . if a program is deemed not viable let's use assessment to determine how we can make it viable."	
	". . . assessment results have to be used for change . . . ."	
	"I favor assessment being used for improvement . . . you just can't say, I'm going to keep a program that has the highest retention rate or the highest graduation rate."	

Figure 15: Practitioner Response Summary for Interview Question 6

Figure 15 offers the theme that the appropriate use of assessment results to determine the future of unproductive or poor quality programs should be for continuous improvement.



Summing up the inclinations of most participants, continuous improvement can be a valid strategy to follow if latitude for time is permitted, P-J stated:

In a situation where a program has years of data, the evidence clearly points toward some directions for improvement, . . . yet the faculty or administration drag their feet, refuse to make improvements, and try to defend their program in spite of all the obvious evidence . . . . The assessment practitioner may simply be saying, if they are unwilling to attempt the program improvement, then perhaps the assessment results should be used to discontinue the program.

Question 7 concentrated on the matter of quality assurance as it relates to the assessment process; it asked: Almost half of the respondents indicated that after 7 years Virginia's assessment program has not succeeded in assuring quality in Commonwealth's community colleges. What specific information might you provide that supports this belief? What information might you provide that refutes this belief?

N	PRACTITIONER RESPONSES	THEMES
5	"I think you have to define quality, and it may be the definition of quality that is at issue."	Assessment results, improvement and progress but not quality assurance
	"I don't know what we mean by quality. Since that's not defined, I don't know if we are achieving it. If it's progress . . . I can measure progress."	
	". . . budget and planning people have no idea what assessment people are doing . . . if they don't know what the results of assessment are, how can you say you have quality."	
	". . . I really do believe that student assessment is helping us to be better."	
	"I believe we are making improvements . . . . I think we are coming closer and closer to improving quality."	

Figure 16: Practitioner Response Summary for Interview Question 7

Figure 16 shows that assessment practices in Virginia are questionable in assuring quality. The practitioners were generally unsure of the effect of assessment on quality in Virginia's community colleges. Most linked assessment results

to ongoing improvement and progress rather than certification of quality assurance. P-I summed this position up by stating,

I think there has been improvement. There has been no program on campus that hasn't been improved by assessment . . . and I think that the faculty have bought into it. . . . That doesn't assure quality by itself, but I think it certainly contributes to quality.

Interview question 8 asked:

If the state were to revisit the assessment of community college education what guidelines or approaches would you like to see addressed in the future?

N	PRACTITIONER RESPONSES	THEMES
3	<p>"I think we need to look at performance of transfer students in terms of how well the community college is preparing them for the four-year school."</p> <p>" . . . I think that is an important focus to have . . . to work closer with the universities."</p> <p>" . . . we are still having problems with getting information from senior institutions about the success of transfer students . . . a real important element of our assessment needs to be improving this since we are finding increased enrollments in the transfer programs."</p>	The relationship of outcomes assessment to the transfer process
5	<p>"I think the reports are interesting, but it is a never ending shelf of reports that nobody reads . . . if we could look at two programs, just two . . . people might sit down a read it."</p> <p>I'm not convinced that we have the best reporting mechanism . . . the reports need to be more focused."</p> <p>"I'm not sure that we need to report all that we report every year."</p> <p>" . . . all to often assessments get put on the back burner until you have to write the report . . . require every college to document some kind of change in a program each year."</p> <p>" . . . there should be some formalized way that everybody does data gathering."</p>	Importance of the reporting versus the importance of the assessing

Figure 17: Practitioner Response Summary for Interview Question 8

Figure 17 exhibits two major theme patterns reflecting the beliefs held by practitioners relative to future assessment practices. The relationship of assessment to the

transfer of students from community colleges to senior institutions was an important consideration. Secondly, determining the degree of emphasis placed on reporting results as compared to the emphasis placed on actual assessment of student achievement emerged as a significant concern.

The answer to the research question, Do practitioners at the local community college believe that the assessment guidelines, called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 have been satisfactorily implemented in Virginia's community colleges?, is addressed in the synthesis of the survey results and the thematic patterns accruing from the interviews with selected community college practitioners.

The interview phase of the study produced the following thematic findings:

Relating to Guidelines 1 and 2 (Appendix 4) the practitioners believe that a generally applied standardized testing program used across all Virginia community colleges would be ill advised. Citing its threat to institutional diversity practitioners encouraged multiple measurement approaches. There was a sense expressed by some practitioners that standardized testing might prove beneficial as a tool for comparison. Relating to Guidelines 7 and 8, (Appendix 4), the practitioners believe that Virginia's citizenry is not being properly informed as to the quality of community

college education. A predominant theme to surface assigned this deficiency to the absence of uniformity and consistency in reporting assessment practices and results.

Regarding Guideline 4 (Appendix 4), the practitioners believe that Virginia's community college students are not being appropriately assessed in general education. An important theme emerging here related to vagueness and inconsistencies in the process of assessing general education. A second theme to surface in the area of general education assessment was the importance of base standards and normed measurements.

Relating to Guideline 9 (Appendix 4) practitioners believe that demonstrating continuous program improvement is more important than producing reportable results. Similarly, the practitioners believe that content assessment is more beneficial to ensuring scholarly integrity than reportable results.

Relating to Guideline 10 (Appendix 4), practitioners strongly believe that assessment should not be used to compare the effectiveness and quality of one community college with another. An important theme to consider is the diversity and differences that define Virginia's community colleges.

Regarding Guidelines 9 and 10 (Appendix 4), practitioners believe that assessment results should be used to help make decisions to terminate unproductive or poor quality academic programs. The dominant theme to emerge here was that program assessment should be directed toward continuous improvement, as an alternative to termination. In responding to the issue of the association of outcomes assessment and quality assurance, practitioners believe that assessment results can assure improvement and progress, but are inconclusive in assuring quality.

Concerning the future of assessment in Virginia practitioners believe that the relationship of outcomes assessment and the transfer process must be strengthened. Another theme to emerge here is the conflict between the importance of reporting versus the importance of assessing.

Through synthesis of findings accruing from the quantitative portion of the study practitioners exhibited the following beliefs:

Regarding Guideline 2 (Appendix 4), practitioners believe that admission information, retention and completion data, alumni follow-up studies, job placement data, licensure and certification information, accreditation reports, and studies of student transfer were important

elements in assessing student achievement in Virginia's community colleges.

Concerning Guideline 4 (Appendix 4), practitioners believe that students are being appropriately assessed in selected majors. Relating to Guideline 6 (Appendix 4), practitioners believe that community colleges are effective in the assessment of students who have been diagnosed as in need of remediation, there was congruence.

There was even stronger agreement among the practitioners concerning Guideline 5 (Appendix 4), relative to the effectiveness of community colleges in assessing the placement of entering students into degree-credit work. The "Guidelines for Student Assessment" calls for the provision of progress reports on first-year students who received diplomas in Virginia during the prior year and on transfer students. The practitioners concurred strongly relative to Guideline 7 (Appendix 4), on the importance of these reports to the student outcomes assessment program in Virginia.

### **Research Question**

**Is there congruence between the beliefs of state legislators and community college practitioners regarding the implementation of assessment guidelines as called for in**



**Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 in Virginia's community colleges?**

From the analysis of both the quantitative and qualitative findings, there were areas of congruence between the legislative and practitioner groups relative to the implementation of "The Guidelines for Student Assessment."

GUIDELINE CONTEXT	LEGISLATIVE THEME PATTERN	PRACTITIONER THEME PATTERN
Virginia's citizenry not being properly informed of assessment results	Public apathy and disinterest	Absence of uniformity and consistency in reporting assessment practices and results
General education assessment	General education as a fundamental thread running through the educational system  Inconsistent understanding of general education	General education as a common thread in education  Vagueness and inconsistencies associated with general education assessment
Use of assessment results to make decisions about the future of programs	Assessment and management practices  Assessment and economic decisions	Program assessment in terms of continuous improvement
Recommendations and suggestions for the future	Assessment and college transfer	The relationship of outcomes assessment to the transfer process  Importance of the reporting versus the importance of the assessing

Figure 18: Legislative and Practitioner Congruence Summary

Figure 18 reflects those belief congruencies that emerged from the interview phase of the study.

The answer to the research question, Is there congruence between the beliefs of state legislators and community college practitioners regarding implementation of assessment guidelines as called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 in

Virginia's community colleges?, is addressed in the synthesis of the thematic patterns accruing from the interviews as exhibited in Figure 18 and the results obtained from analysis of the survey responses.

Both cohorts exhibited congruence in both the quantitative and qualitative phases of the study when they offered that Virginia's citizenry was not being properly informed as to the quality of community college education. The interviews revealed that their beliefs may have surfaced around differing theme patterns.

The interview findings indicated congruence relative to the assessment of community college students in general education. The beliefs of both groups concerning this guideline area were grounded in similar theme patterns. Like findings emerged when the participants were queried as to their beliefs concerning the use of assessment results in determining the future of unproductive or poor quality programs in community colleges. Both groups offered theme patterns associated with management practice.

An important area to emerge across both respondent groups during the interview phase related to inconsistencies and difficulties pertaining to the transfer of students from community colleges to upper-level institutions.

The quantitative findings showed that both participant groups felt that admission information, retention and completion data, alumni follow-up studies, job placement data, licensure and certification information, accreditation reports, and studies of student transfer were important elements in assessing student achievement in Virginia's community colleges.

When questioned about their beliefs as to whether community college students are being appropriately assessed in selected majors and the effectiveness of community colleges in the assessment of students who have been diagnosed as in need of remediation, there was congruence. There was even stronger agreement when participants were probed as to the effectiveness of assessing the placement of entering students into degree-credit work.

The "Guidelines for Student Assessment" (Appendix 4) calls for the provision of progress reports on first-year students who received diplomas in Virginia during the prior year and on transfer students. Both the legislators and practitioners concurred strongly on the importance of these reports to the student outcomes assessment program in Virginia.

## CHAPTER V

### Summary, Conclusions, and Recommendations

#### Summary

The purpose of this study was to investigate the beliefs of state legislators and community college assessment practitioners toward implementation of mandated student outcomes assessment guidelines in the Commonwealth of Virginia. The analysis focused on Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 and the "Guidelines for Student Assessment" which resulted from its passage in 1986. Using a combined quantitative and qualitative methodology, the following research questions were pursued. Do legislators believe that the assessment guidelines called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 have been satisfactorily implemented in Virginia's community colleges? Do practitioners at the local community college believe that assessment guidelines as called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 have been satisfactorily implemented in Virginia's community colleges? Is there congruence between the beliefs of state legislators and community college practitioners regarding the implementation of assessment guidelines as called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 in Virginia's community colleges?

Using the "Guidelines for Student Assessment" as a foundation, a survey instrument was created and administered

to the selected legislative and practitioner participants. Based on a quantitative analysis of the responses, a structured interview protocol was developed for each group. Each interview item was devised to elicit responses that would provide insight into each participant's beliefs relative to the implementation of student outcomes assessment guidelines in Virginia.

Certain themes emerged from analysis of related documents and the interview findings. These themes proved fundamental in arriving at conclusions germane to the above stated research questions. Study elements that evolved were;

**The communication of assessment results to the public.**

**The relationship of outcomes assessment and general education.**

**A common statewide assessment strategy.**

**Application of a standard testing program across colleges.**

**Public accountability and institutional autonomy.**

**The association of assessment and program improvement.**

**The linkage of assessment to the transfer process.**

**Assessment and quality assurance.**

### **Conclusions**

The following conclusions are drawn from research conducted on the implementation of the "Guidelines for Student

Assessment" which resulted from the passage of Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 in 1986.

1. Coupled with the requirement contained in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83, that results of student achievement measurement be reported to the public, the implementation of Guidelines 7 and 8 calling for the dissemination of information on assessment results is ineffective. Both legislative and practitioner participants believe that Virginia's citizenry was not being properly informed as to results of student achievement measurement in community colleges. Obstacles to effective communication of assessment results were ascribed to public apathy, inability to define how student achievement is determined, the necessity of objectively reporting positive, as well as, negative results, no strategy for packaging assessment results uniformly, and reducing complex data into discernable, meaningful constructs.

The reporting process that now exists is considered closed, in that it involves the collection of data which is interpreted internally by each college. These individual college results are condensed by the Virginia Community College System Office and passed on to SCHEV where they are reported in the biennial edition of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education. This document is not widely circulated among the citizenry.

The responsibility for communicating assessment results to the citizenry is generally believed by both groups to rest with that entity closest to the processes and practices, the individual community colleges.

2. A significant deficiency is believed to exist in the implementation of Assessment Guideline 4 in the Commonwealth's community colleges. Both respondent groups asserted that general education constituted the core of the undergraduate experience, that it should be the common thread that runs through every educational level, and that it was fundamental in any strategy employed in assessing student achievement. Yet, both cohorts believe that the general education assessment procedures and practices are at best inconsistent, or at worse ineffective. This belief is grounded in the following concerns; general education is difficult to define and, therefore, difficult to assess. When assessment is undertaken it often proves confusing and incompatible, with one community college measuring computational and verbal achievement employing standardized testing instruments to do so, while another employs a course specific, content based technique.

3. Guideline 1 allows for the evaluation of undergraduate student outcomes appropriate to the mission of each college. The beliefs of the legislative participants differed significantly (alpha level of .002) from those of the



practitioner respondents as to its implementation. A clear consensus emerged among the legislative participants that a common strategy employed across all community colleges to assess student outcomes might prove effective. The perspectives that surfaced were grounded in the beliefs that a coordinated front was important in overcoming any doubts or skepticism held by citizens about the assessment process. Common goals and objectives could bring uniformity to the program. The creation of common denominators would enable the state to better judge institutional productivity. Common assessment approaches should exist within certain disciplines such as teacher training, similar to licensure approaches employed in allied health disciplines.

There was opposition to the prospect of a statewide standard assessment approach from the practitioner respondents. They displayed a belief that an assessment program must fit the curricula and student profile of individual institutions, and in so doing garner the support of diverse faculty interests. Belief in continuing the tradition of distinct individual institutional missions was also at the core of their opposition.

4. Relating to the implementation of Guideline 2 and the use of nationally normed instruments for assessing student outcomes, legislators support the use of standardized testing across Virginia's community colleges. These participants cite

the belief that standards should be established against which student performance could be measured. Borrowing from a business/industry viewpoint, benchmarking was mentioned frequently as useful in establishing minimum levels of quality in higher education. The lawmakers believe that a common testing program administered across all community colleges would assure citizens that no matter what community college they attend, they could expect a certain basic level of education.

Citing the instructional diversity and varying institutional scope, the practitioners disagreed with the prospect of implementing a standardized testing approach across community colleges. Some asserted that the purposes and uses of results are too complex to effectively employ such a uniform testing scheme.

5. Throughout the investigation, the notion that accountability to the state could only occur at the expense of institutional autonomy never surfaced. To the contrary, the belief persisted among both respondent groups that the implementation of the "Guidelines for Student Assessment", while found lacking in effectively communicating assessment results, had generally encouraged accountability to the public and did not threaten institutional integrity, or autonomy. In fact, both legislators and practitioners expressed the belief that using assessment results to compare relative progress at

institutions, to evaluate the future of unproductive, or poor quality programs, and to determine program specific budgetary allocations could be constructive.

Both groups feel that the analysis should be employed as a management tool to offer constructive improvements and alternatives to potential program discontinuance. Budgetary accountability should continue to be addressed through specific incentive programs similar to those developed by the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia. A program specific reward system could prove beneficial in providing continuing funding for exemplary, or need based programming as evidenced through the assessment process.

6. Concerning the implementation of Guideline 9 which addressed the association of assessment to program improvement, the findings of the study proved inconclusive. The question that surfaced frequently during the time spent with practitioners is fundamental to understanding their overall belief about the implementation of the assessment guidelines in Virginia's community colleges. Is the ongoing assessment process more important to improving programs than determining and reporting program results? The practitioners were evenly split in responding to this question. Some felt that it was the creation of assessment methods in cooperation with faculty that had the greatest impact on improving programs. Still others believed that changes that would make

programs better could only accrue from meaningful assessment results.

7. Both participant groups felt that implementation of Guideline 8 was inadequate believing that assessment should play a much stronger role in the transfer process among Virginia's public colleges and universities. This proved to be an important theme with practitioners and legislators as they addressed future aspirations for student outcomes assessment in the Commonwealth.

The concern that has been expressed by senior institutions about the preparedness of community college students in general education and in major studies could be ameliorated through an articulated assessment strategy. At the same time, community college educators could offer meaningful evidence of the readiness of two-year students through an assessment approach that is cooperatively established in consultation and development with four-year institutional colleagues. The guidelines currently promote and encourage basic information sharing. This sharing is not uniform, or consistent, and falls short of addressing the substantive issues of content, instructional approach, and evaluation.

8. Similar to the uncertainty expressed about the relationship of outcomes and general education, like uncertainty was evident in the practitioners beliefs

concerning the effect of assessment on assuring quality in community college education as called for in the preamble to the "Guidelines for Student Assessment." The consensus that surfaced was that neither SCHEV, nor the higher education community, in general, has defined quality and, therefore, outcomes assessment, nor any other process can be held up as assuring quality. The respondents believed that assessment had improved the education process, and that assessment has proven beneficial in measuring progress. But all stopped short of linking assessment to quality assurance.

9. The implementation of those guidelines relating to data collection methods, sharing results with individual students, interval assessment, the use of sampling procedures, remediation, and progress reports on first-year students who received high school diplomas in Virginia the previous year were believed to be effective and both respondent groups encouraged their retention.

**Recommendations for Further Research**

The most important question raised by this study for future research is: After eight years of mandated student outcomes assessment in Virginia's community colleges, have the associated processes and practices proven effective in assuring the citizens of the Commonwealth continuing high quality of post-secondary education? Consideration of this question leads to reflection on related ancillary issues.

The study of the beliefs of legislators and community college practitioners concerning the implementation of those assessment guidelines called for in Senate Joint Resolution No. 83 raised a series of intriguing issues related not only to the development of educational policy, but also to fundamental educational practice. Specific to educational policy, an important question to be considered is, who is the audience for assessment reporting, and does the reporting address their needs and concerns about quality? Study needs to be undertaken to determine the relevance of assessment findings, their practicality, usefulness, and interpretation. In terms of higher education policy, differing perspectives are beginning to emerge about accountability and assessment. Research needs to be undertaken to determine how assessment might become a tool in recovering, maintaining, and garnering resources and documenting the implications of budget cuts. Education policy regarding student transfer could be

influenced by investigative findings illustrating how assessment might contribute to greater consistency and uniformity in the transfer of students from the community college to four year institutions?

In the context of educational practice, future research should be pursued concerning the place of standardized achievement measurement in the assessment process and its contribution, if any, to ensuring seamless education and training continuity from the secondary through the senior college level. An important question that warrants further study is how might Virginia's assessment program be configured so as to frame, articulate, and measure general education throughout the Commonwealth's institutions of higher education?

Additional research could also contribute to a clearer understanding of the linkage of assessment to program improvement. Should assessment strategies focus on the ends of program improvement, or the progressive efforts committed to those ends? Can assessment accommodate both perspectives?

The ways that assessment is practiced in Virginia will inevitably change. New approaches and designs will make current tactics obsolete. The objective of shaping our educational practices to contribute to and enhance the collegiate experience of the state's students, however, must remain constant.

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## Appendix 1

### 1985 SESSION

LD9146146

1                                   **SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 125**  
2                                   **AMENDMENT IN THE NATURE OF A SUBSTITUTE**  
3                                   (Proposed by the Senate Committee on Rules on  
4                                   February 1, 1985)

5                                   (Patron Prior to Substitute—Senator Russell, R. E.)

6 *Requesting the Senate Committee on Education and Health and the House Committee on*  
7 *Education to establish a joint subcommittee to study the quality of higher education in*  
8 *the Commonwealth.*

9       WHEREAS, Virginia's public institutions of higher education are a source of pride to the  
10 Commonwealth and the basis for the State's continued economic and cultural growth; and

11       WHEREAS, Virginia has an investment in excess of \$1 billion in physical plant and over  
12 \$300 million in equipment in its institutions of higher education; and

13       WHEREAS, Virginia historically devotes over seventeen percent of its general funds in  
14 the biennial budget to higher education, which amounts to over \$1.3 billion in general  
15 funds in the current biennium; and

16       WHEREAS, continued, broad public support for Virginia's system of higher education is  
17 essential to the system's growth and well-being; and

18       WHEREAS, various studies of higher education have raised questions about curriculum  
19 requirements, quality of instruction, and student achievement in the nation's colleges and  
20 universities; now, therefore, be it

21       RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the Senate  
22 Committee on Education and Health and the House Committee on Education are requested  
23 to establish a joint subcommittee to review, with the State Council of Higher Education,  
24 state college and university officials, and interested citizens, student achievement in  
25 Virginia's public higher education system, and to investigate means by which student  
26 achievement may be measured to assure the citizens of Virginia of the continuing high  
27 quality of higher education in the Commonwealth.

28       The joint subcommittee shall be composed of eight members, three from the  
29 membership of the Senate Committee on Education and Health to be appointed by the  
30 Senate Committee on Privileges and Elections, and five from the membership of the House  
31 Committee on Education to be appointed by the Speaker of the House. The joint  
32 subcommittee shall submit its recommendations to the 1986 Session of the General  
33 Assembly.

34       The costs of this study, including direct and indirect costs, are estimated to be \$16,410.

REPORT OF STUDY CONDUCTED  
BY THE COUNCIL OF  
HIGHER EDUCATION FOR VIRGINIA

The Measurement of Student  
Achievement and the  
Assurance of Quality in  
Virginia Higher Education

TO THE GOVERNOR AND  
THE GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF VIRGINIA



Senate Document No. 14

COMMONWEALTH OF VIRGINIA  
RICHMOND  
1986

*Senate Document No. 14 (January 1986)*

Recommendations for Measuring Student Achievement  
at Virginia's Public Colleges and Universities

Citizens of the Commonwealth, parents and students have a right to hold institutions of higher education accountable for effective teaching and learning. Institutions can benefit from more systematic knowledge of student achievement. The Council recommends against a system-wide minimum competency testing program for Virginia as the best means to measure student achievement. This approach lacks several characteristics of a good assessment program. It promotes standardization, is insensitive to important institutional differences in mission and curriculum, ignores broader educational objectives which should be assessed, threatens to establish minimums as the norm, and fails to contribute to improvement of the teaching and learning that occur in classrooms. Virginia has worked long and carefully to nurture a diverse set of colleges and universities. It is not appropriate to impose a single statewide test upon this diversity.

The Council proposes an alternative approach to measure student achievement that encompasses a wider range of educational objectives. The Council thinks this approach will preserve the diverse system of public colleges and universities in Virginia and maintain the Commonwealth's commitment to access and quality in higher education.

Assessment programs alone will not guarantee improvements in student achievement. Complementary actions are needed to strengthen education programs at all levels of formal schooling, from elementary through graduate education. The increased requirements for high school graduation recently established by the Board of Education, for example, should improve students' preparation for college. Institutions of higher education should support this change by upgrading their admission requirements, with special emphasis on the academic courses completed in high school. Attention should be focused on the elementary and middle or junior high school curricula to ensure that students will be prepared and motivated to pursue the more stringent optional academic diploma. Colleges and universities should examine the relationship between the undergraduate and graduate curricula and evaluate graduate and professional education to assess quality and identify ways to improve these programs.

The Council recognizes that assessment can be costly. As institutions establish their programs, they will have to consider ways to minimize costs, by using information already available, by employing sampling techniques, and by adopting standardized tests of achievement where feasible.

The Council recommends the following actions as the best means to measure student achievement at the Commonwealth's colleges and universities.

Recommendation 1: That the academic relationship between secondary and higher education be strengthened:

(a) By developing programs such as the Ohio Board of Regents' Early Testing Program to help high school students prepare for college and the Minnesota early admissions program to reward those who demonstrate an ability to do college-level work; and

(b) By providing reports from colleges and universities that tell the high schools how well their former students are doing in college.

Recommendation 2: That all state-supported institutions of higher education establish procedures and programs to measure student achievement. These programs should:

(a) Derive from institutional initiatives, recognizing the diversity of Virginia's public colleges and universities, the tradition of institutional autonomy, and the capacity of faculty and administrators to identify their own problems and solve them creatively;

(b) Be consistent with each institution's mission and educational objectives;

(c) Bear a direct relationship to teaching and learning in the classroom, enabling faculty to use the results to address student deficiencies, evaluate and improve the curriculum, and develop better teaching techniques;

(d) Involve faculty in setting the standards of achievement, selecting the measurement instruments and analyzing the results;

(e) Consider the relative importance of both assessment to determine student attainment as measured by an absolute standard and assessment of student growth in learning attributable to the influence of the institution;

(f) Follow student progress through the curriculum, as appropriate, with consideration of achievement measures (1) at transition points to ensure student readiness to proceed, (2) upon completion of the major, and (3) at graduation or on leaving the institution; and

(g) Include follow-up of graduates through employer surveys, studies of participation rates in further education and alumni reports of career progress.

Recommendation 3: That institutions administer tests to determine the entry-level skills of students whose past performance, as defined by high school grades or Scholastic Aptitude Test scores, indicates they might have difficulty doing college-level work; and that each institution identify a minimum threshold of achievement to qualify for college degree-credit courses.

Recommendation 4: That institutions with students whose skills fall below the threshold established for college-level work provide remedial education to maintain access while improving the quality of students' performance prior to full participation in degree credit courses. Where possible, remediation for students at four-year institutions should be arranged through agreements with community colleges. No credit toward a degree should be awarded for remedial work.

Recommendation 5: That an advisory committee to the Council of Higher Education be established to develop guidelines for designing good assessment programs, to assist the institutions on request to develop the programs, and to advise the Council on progress in this area.

Recommendation 6: That the state-supported colleges and universities submit annual reports of progress in developing their assessment programs and concrete, non-anecdotal and quantifiable information on student achievement to the Council of Higher Education. The reports should include information about the achievement of transfer students from the community colleges enrolled in four-year colleges and universities and about the performance of professional program graduates on licensing and certification examinations. The Council should publish results of the assessment programs and reports of other actions to strengthen educational quality in its biennial revisions to the Virginia Plan for Higher Education.



Appendix 3

1986 SESSION

LD1746128

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 83

Offered January 21, 1986

Regarding the recommendations of the State Council of Higher Education regarding measurements of student achievements.

Patron—Lambert

Referred to Committee on Rules

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WHEREAS, Senate Joint Resolution No. 125 of the 1985 Session of the General Assembly requested the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to study the means by which student achievement may be measured to assure the citizens of Virginia the continuing high quality of higher education in the Commonwealth; and

WHEREAS, the Council study determined that all public colleges and universities should establish procedures and programs consistent with each institution's mission and educational objectives to measure student achievement; and

WHEREAS, the Council study determined that the best programs to measure student achievement are related directly to teaching and learning in the classroom, include assessments of entry-level skills of students who might have difficulty doing college work, identify a minimum threshold of achievement for students to qualify for college degree-credit courses, and establish standards for student progress to higher levels of the curriculum; and

WHEREAS, the Council proposes the establishment of an advisory committee to develop guidelines for designing good assessment programs, to help the institutions develop programs, and to advise the Council based on annual reports by the institutions of concrete, quantifiable information on student achievement; now, therefore, be it

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the General Assembly accepts the recommendations of the Council study and affirms its conviction that student achievement should be measured as a means to assure the continuing high quality of higher education in the Commonwealth; and, be it

RESOLVED FURTHER, That the institutions and their boards of visitors are requested to establish assessment programs to measure student achievement; and that the Council, in cooperation with the state-supported colleges and universities, should establish guidelines for designing good assessment programs and report to the public results of institutional efforts to measure student achievement in its biennial revisions of *The Virginia Plan for Higher Education*.

Official Use By Clerks	
Agreed to By The Senate	Agreed to By The House of Delegates
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## Appendix 4

### Guidelines for Student Assessment

Senate Joint Resolution 125, passed by the 1985 Virginia General Assembly, directed the Council of Higher Education "to investigate means by which student achievement may be measured to assure the citizens of Virginia the continuing high quality of higher education in the Commonwealth." The study was presented to the 1986 General Assembly as Senate Document No. 14. In Senate Joint Resolution 83, the assembly accepted the recommendations made in the study and requested institutions of higher education in the state "to establish assessment programs to measure student achievement." It further resolved that "the Council, in cooperation with the state-supported colleges and universities, should establish guidelines for designing good assessment programs and report to the public results of institutional efforts to measure student achievement in its biennial revisions of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education."

In November 1986, a meeting was convened of representatives from colleges and universities which already were developing assessment plans. The group's task was to establish guidelines that respected both the complexity of the issue and the need to provide state-wide coherence to the assessment plans. The committee was guided in its work by the recommendations contained in Senate Document No. 14.

#### Guideline 1

Plans to evaluate undergraduate student outcomes should be appropriate to the mission of each institution and allow for diversity of program goals. As far as possible institutions should use multiple indicators of student achievement. These should be appropriate to the disciplines in question; the goals of the various programs; and the intellectual, performance, attitudinal, or emotional outcomes being assessed. Individual institutions may focus their reports either on absolute measures of student learning and performance or on the contribution the institution has made to the student's development ("value-added assessment").

#### Guideline 2

In many cases, data collected for other reasons will be suitable for assessment purposes. Some examples might be admissions information, retention and completion data, alumni follow-up studies, job placement data, information on licensing and certification examinations, accreditation reports, other assessment studies, state-wide program reviews, retention studies, and studies of community-college transfer students. Institutions may want to select appropriate nationally available instruments or create campus-based measures. In deciding which existing measures to use and in developing new ones, faculty involvement is critical.

## Guideline 3

In developing or selecting assessment procedures, institutions should consider the effect the procedures will have on students and ensure that they do not take an unreasonable amount of time or cause undue hardship on individual students. Wherever appropriate or feasible, the results should be shared with individual students, with follow-up support provided when necessary.

## Guideline 4

Students should be assessed at appropriate intervals during college, and data should be collected on alumni. The assessments should include student outcomes in general education and in the major. Institutions need not assess students who are only taking occasional courses. Rather than measuring the learning and performance of every student, it may be appropriate to use sampling procedures. Every program need not be measured every year, but each institution is responsible for developing a plan that will measure student outcomes in all undergraduate programs on a regular schedule.

## Guideline 5

As part of the institutional description published in The Virginia Plan, each institution should identify minimal verbal and quantitative skills, below which threshold students will need remediation at that institution. It should describe how it identifies incoming high-risk students-- such as by SAT scores, high-school grades, or other indicators-- and its plans for assessing their verbal and quantitative skills. It should indicate how placement in remedial courses affects a student's admission into degree-credit work.

## Guideline 6

Each institution should describe its plans for and its means of measuring the success of remediation, including, for instance, the retention, progress, and graduation rates of remediated students. Where possible, remediation for students at senior institutions should be arranged through agreements with community colleges. Credits for remedial courses should count in the student's academic load and the institution's FTE calculations but not toward degree requirements.

## Guideline 7

Each year institutions of higher education in Virginia should provide progress reports on all full-time, first-year students who received high-school diplomas in Virginia during the prior year, containing information such as retention, grade-point average, and whether students are taking remedial coursework. The report should be sent to the State Council of Higher Education, which will work with the Department of Education to distribute the information to the schools or the school divisions.

## Guideline 8

Similar material should be compiled by senior institutions for Virginia community-college transfer students, along with graduation information and the number of credits transferred. The data should be sent to the State Council of Higher Education, which will distribute the information to the appropriate parties.

## Guideline 9

It is each institution's responsibility to evaluate its assessment procedures initially and regularly thereafter. It should ensure that those procedures meet standards within the field for scholarly integrity, are compatible with the institutional mission and program goals, and are useful for program improvement.

## Guideline 10

The purpose of assessment is not to compare institutions but to improve student learning and performance. As part of its plan, therefore, each institution should have in place or develop student, faculty, and curricular development programs to address identified areas of weakness.

The plans will be described in a report on student assessment to be published in the 1987 revision to The Virginia Plan. They will therefore be due to the State Council in June, 1987. In accordance with the guidelines above, they should contain identifications or descriptions of the following:

- Assessment procedures for general education
- Assessment procedures for the majors
- Alumni follow-up studies
- The skills necessary to do college-degree-credit work at the institution
- Procedures for identifying high-risk students

- Policies regarding placement of students doing remedial work in degree-credit courses
- Plans for remediation
- Methods of assessing the success of remediation
- The timetable for implementation of the assessment plan
- Procedures for evaluating the assessment plan
- Plans for faculty, student, and curricular development programs to address identified problems or deficiencies.

By 1989, institutions will begin to report the results of their assessment procedures. The published results of the assessment should be concrete, more than anecdotal, and presented in quantified form.

April 3, 1987

## Appendix 5

January 21, 1994

Dr. Carmon Kiah  
John Tyler Community College  
Chester Campus  
13101 Jefferson Davis Highway  
Chester, Va. 223831

Dear Dr. Kiah,

I am a doctoral student in the Administrative and Educational Services Division at Virginia Tech and am conducting dissertation research on Virginia's higher education student outcomes assessment program. As you know, the 1986 General Assembly enacted Senate Joint Resolution 83, mandating that Virginia's institutions of higher education "establish assessment programs to measure student achievement." The legislature further directed the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to establish guidelines for "designing good assessment programs."

I would be grateful if you would indulge me in two requests. First, please take a few moments and complete the attached survey. I know your schedule is quite busy: because of that, I have made the survey as brief as possible.

Note that the first 12 questions were created around those SCHEV guidelines referred to above. Questions 13 through 15 are offered to elicit responses reflecting your perspective on Virginia's "overall" student assessment effort. Would you please return the completed survey in the enclosed envelope as soon as possible, or forward same by FAX to me at (703) 857-7204.

My second request is that you permit me an appointment for an interview concerning Virginia's student outcomes assessment program. Upon receipt of all completed surveys, I will formulate interview questions based upon your responses. At that time, I will contact you for an appropriate interview time.

You have been selected because of your experience with the SCHEV assessment guidelines, and with Virginia's

assessment effort to date. Therefore, your assistance is both essential and greatly appreciated.

I am genuinely indebted to you for your help. I believe that this research can be of significance to all of us concerned with the effectiveness of higher education in Virginia.

Sincerely,

Mark Q. Emick Sr.  
Virginia Western Community College

## Appendix 6

January 14, 1994

The Honorable J. Paul Council, Jr.  
General Assembly Building  
Richmond, Va. 23219

Dear Delegate Council:

I am a doctoral student in the Administrative and Educational Services Division at Virginia Tech, and am conducting dissertation research on Virginia's higher education student outcomes assessment program. As you know, the 1986 General Assembly enacted Senate Joint Resolution 83, mandating that Virginia's institutions of higher education "establish assessment programs to measure student achievement." The legislature further directed the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia to establish guidelines for "designing good assessment programs." I have attached a copy of the Joint Resolution and the resulting SCHEV guidelines for your review.

I would be grateful if you would indulge me in two requests. First, please take a few moments and complete the attached survey. I know your schedule is quite busy; because of that, I have made the survey as brief as possible.

Note that the first 12 questions were created around those SCHEV guidelines referred to above. Questions 13 through 15 are offered to elicit responses reflecting your perspective on Virginia's "overall" student assessment effort. Would you please hold the survey upon completion, and I will collect it from your office.

My second request is that you permit me an appointment to interview you concerning Virginia's student outcomes assessment program. Upon receipt of all completed surveys, I will formulate my interview questions based upon your responses. At that time, I will contact your legislative assistant for an appropriate time to meet with you.

You have been selected because of your experience with the 1986 legislation, and service on the House Education



Committee. Therefore, your assistance is both essential and greatly appreciated.

I am genuinely indebted to you for your help. I believe that this research can be of significance to all of us concerned with the effectiveness of higher education in Virginia.

Sincerely,

Mark Q. Emick Sr.

Appendix 7

SURVEY INSTRUMENT  
MARK EMICK  
DOCTORAL CANDIDATE - VIRGINIA TECH

The 1986 General Assembly, accepting the recommendations of the State Council for Higher Education, passed Senate Joint Resolution 83 mandating that Virginia's institutions of higher education "establish assessment programs to measure student achievement." The legislature further directed the State Council to, in cooperation with state supported colleges and universities, establish guidelines for "designing good assessment programs".

Please answer the following questions by placing an "X" beside that response most closely reflecting your opinion, or viewpoint.

1. Do you believe that the strategy used in assessing undergraduate student achievement should be determined by each community college in Virginia, "appropriate to its individual mission?"

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

2. Do you believe that the assessment of undergraduate student achievement should be determined by a standard testing program implemented across all Virginia community colleges?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

3. Do you believe that Virginia's citizenry is properly informed as to the quality of the community college education in the Commonwealth?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

4. Are admissions information, retention and completion data, alumni follow-up studies, job placement data, information on licensing and certification examinations, accreditation reports, studies of transfer students, etc. important in determining student achievement for community college students?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      NO \_\_\_\_\_

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

5. Do you believe that Virginia's community college students are being appropriately assessed in general education ?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

6. Do you believe that Virginia's community college students are being appropriately assessed in their selected majors?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

7. Do you believe that Virginia's community colleges are effective in assessing the placement of entering students into degree-credit work?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

8. Do you believe that Virginia's community colleges have demonstrated success in dealing with students having been diagnosed as in need of remediation?

YES  NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

9. Do you believe the process of providing "progress reports on all full-time, first year students who received high school diplomas in Virginia during the prior year, containing information such as retention, grade point average, and whether students are taking remedial coursework" is important in assessing student achievement in Virginia's community colleges?

YES  NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

10. Do you believe that a similar process of providing progress reports on transfer students, including "graduation information and the number of credits transferred" is important in assessing student achievement in Virginia's community colleges?

YES  NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

11. Do you believe that community colleges in Virginia are consistently "insuring that their assessment procedures meet standards for scholarly integrity, are compatible with the institutional mission and program goals, and are useful for program improvement?"

YES  NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

12. Do you believe that Virginia's assessment results should be used to compare the effectiveness and overall quality of one community college with another?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

13. Do you believe that assessment should be used to help make decisions to terminate unproductive or poor quality academic programs in community colleges?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

14. Do you believe that assessment results should be a factor in determining general fund support to individual community colleges?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

15. Seven years after passage of Senate Joint Resolution 83, do you believe that Virginia's assessment of student achievement has succeeded in assuring quality in Virginia's community colleges?

\_\_\_\_\_ YES                      \_\_\_\_\_ NO

COMMENTS: \_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_  
\_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 8

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### STRUCTURED LEGISLATOR QUESTIONS

1. 58 percent of the legislative respondents believe that there should be a common strategy used among all community colleges in

assessing student achievement. Can you explain this position in light of the State Council for Higher Education in Virginia's assertion that approaches to student assessment should be developed by each college appropriate to its individual mission?

2. Similarly, 58 percent of the legislative participants believe that student achievement should be determined by a standard testing program administered across all community colleges. Why would you concur or differ with this position?

3. 83 percent of the respondents believe that Virginia's citizenry is not being properly informed as to the quality of community college education. Could you offer possible reasons why such a large percentage of legislators would take that position? Why haven't they been informed?

4. Half of the legislative respondents indicated a belief that Virginia's community college students were not being properly assessed in general education. What factors, or perspectives might contribute to this belief?

5. 50 percent of questionnaire respondents believe that assessment results should be used to compare the effectiveness and overall quality of one community college with another. In your opinion how might this type of comparison prove beneficial? How might it prove disadvantageous?

6. Three-fourths of respondents believe that assessment results should be used to help make decisions to terminate unproductive or poor quality programs. Why would this position surface in the face of literature and research that discourages the perception of assessment as a punitive process; that encourages the use of assessment results to improve and enhance education?

7. 58 percent of the legislative respondents indicated that assessment results should be a factor in determining general fund appropriations to community colleges. What might be some criteria or approaches to be met before this could be implemented?

8. If you and other members of the General Assembly were to revisit the assessment mandate now employed across Virginia's public higher education what changes or additions would you like to see addressed in the future?

## Appendix 9

### INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### STRUCTURED PRACTITIONER QUESTIONS

1. Close to a third of the questionnaire respondents indicated a belief that standardized testing should be implemented across the community college system for assessment purposes. What benefit, if any, do you see in this approach?
2. 82 percent of the questionnaire respondents believed that Virginia's citizenry was not being properly informed as to the quality of community college education. Could you cite reasons why this belief is held so strongly?
3. Over three-fourths of the practitioner respondents believed that Virginia's community college students were not being properly assessed in general education. Why might this belief exist so strongly? What might be some appropriate assessment strategies applied to general education? What should be avoided?
4. A modest number of respondents felt that assessment procedures were not addressing scholarly integrity, and were not useful for program improvement. What factors might contribute to this position? Why?
5. All but two of the questionnaire respondents believed that assessment results should not be used to compare the effectiveness and quality of one community college with



another. Why might such a strong belief exist in this context?

6. Fully 55 percent of the respondents felt that assessment results should be used to help make decisions to terminate unproductive, or poor quality programs. Why would this belief surface in the face of literature and research that discourages the perception of assessment as a punitive process; that encourages the use of assessment results to improve and enhance education?

7. Almost half of the respondents indicated that after 7 years, Virginia's assessment program has not succeeded in assuring quality in the Commonwealth's community colleges. What specific information might you provide that supports this belief? What specific information might you provide that refutes this belief?

8. If we as a state were to revisit the assessment of community college education what guidelines or approaches would you like to see addressed in the future?

**VITA**

**MARK QUENTIN EMICK SR.**

**BORN:** June 25, 1948, Roanoke, Virginia

**EDUCATION**

- 1994 Ed.D., Community College Administration, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
- 1977 M.A., Education, Curriculum and Instruction, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University
- 1971 B.S., History and Political Science, Virginia Commonwealth University
- 1969 A.S., Teacher Education, Virginia Western Community College

**PROFESSIONAL EXPERIENCE**

- 1982- Assistant to the President, Virginia Western Community College, Roanoke, Virginia.
- 1979- Assistant Director, Continuing Education, Virginia Western Community College, Roanoke, Virginia.
- 1973- Teacher/Administrator, Lord Botetourt High School, Fincastle, Virginia.
- 1979
- 1971- Teacher, Lord Botetourt High School, Fincastle Virginia.
- 1973

**SIGNATURE**

*Mark Q. Emick Sr.*