

THE DEVELOPMENT
OF
STUDENT ASSESSMENT POLICY IN VIRGINIA

by

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(ABSTRACT)

The primary objectives of this study were to provide detailed understanding of:

- (1) the processes by which Virginia's student assessment policy developed;
- (2) the current expectations and intentions of policy makers in regard to assessment; and
- (3) the anticipated direction of state policy in regard to uses of and further requests for information documenting institutional processes and quality.

Primary data for this study included over 100 document sources, supplemented by interviews with 61 individuals involved in the policy making process.

Virginia's assessment policy was shaped by a national trend toward state efforts to stimulate reform and "quality assurance" procedures in higher education, as well as the interests of the State Council of Higher Education staff in using assessment to advance an agenda for review and renewal of undergraduate curricula. Student assessment has been marked in Virginia by efforts to maintain an institution-

centered approach to the process. As a result of the desire not to characterize assessment as an accountability mechanism, these activities have been guided by general and somewhat vague guidelines and expectations from SCHEV and other state officials.

Assurances that institutions have meaningful and appropriate programs in place were desired, but most officials had limited concepts of what would constitute such processes and further indicated little concern with obtaining or using specific data. Assessment and related activities were seen by state officials as positive and logical components of necessary self-evaluation undergone by any agency or organization. As SCHEV officials awaited the first full institutional reports in summer 1989, it was apparent that only a very negative report on the quality of institutional efforts might spur prescriptive action on the part of the General Assembly.

Dedication

To

and

My wife and our son, whose faith and love have never faltered. As much as the completion of a difficult task is a milestone, this work marks a fitting place for a monument to their patience and spirit.

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First among the many people deserving acknowledgement for the guidance and help they have provided in my work is Dr. Dennis Hinkle, who offered the hand of friendship and a sincere interest in my efforts.

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**The Development
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Student Assessment Policy in Virginia**

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The Development of Student Assessment Policy in Virginia

Introduction

Since the late 1960s concerns have frequently been articulated in various forums over the quality and public accountability of institutions of higher education. Journal articles, state and national commissions, educational organizations and agencies both public and private have asserted the need for colleges and universities to provide clear and broadly acceptable measures of what they do and how they do it (Association of American Colleges, 1985; Bowen, 1977; Corson, 1975; Drucker, 1969; Ewell, 1987a; McConnell, 1981; National Governor's Association, 1986; Resnick, 1987; State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, 1972a). In the early 1970s the focus of accountability interests tended to be on efforts to quantify the inputs and general outputs of higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Lawrence, Weathersby, & Patterson, 1970). In the 1980s such interests have not abated, but have shifted from scrutiny of measures of faculty workload, uniform fiscal data systems, and economic efficiency measures. Greater attention has instead been directed toward obtaining evidence of the effectiveness of colleges and universities in educating students. As a result, many states have adopted measures of various kinds intended to enhance institutional accountability, provide impetus for the reform and improvement of educational prac-

tice, or both (Banta & Moffett, 1987; Boyer, Ewell, Finney, & Mingle, 1987; Ewell & Boyer, 1988; Ewell, 1987a). The current interest of state officials in student assessment as a measurement of effectiveness or "quality control" mechanism is only one of the more recent manifestations of a long standing tension between concepts of institutional autonomy and accountability to governmental authorities (Duryea, 1981; Mingle, 1983; Resnick, 1987). Concerns for the quality of higher education outcomes seem to have risen in tandem with increased demands on public resources, creating an environment in which requests for evidence of both budgetary efficiency and educational effectiveness have become compelling to legislators and governors in many states (Bender, 1977; Bowen, 1974; McConnell, 1981; National Governor's Association, 1986; SCHEV, 1972a, 1973, 1981; Southern Regional Education Board, 1988).

Assessment in the States

The wide variance among states in terms of their political culture, economic/social circumstances, and traditional relationships with higher education is highlighted in the case of assessment. As Lenth (1989) of the State Higher Education Executives Organization (SHEEO) noted, there is great diversity in state activities relating to assessment, with "very different issues being raised in different states." States have varied significantly in the types of models they have applied to assessment as well as the fund-

ing levels they have provided institutions for these activities. The "bewildering complexity" described by Ewell (1987a) as lying beneath the surface of assessment activities across the country in 1987 was described as having not diminished a year later, and had perhaps even increased (Carlisle, 1988; Ewell & Boyer, in press-a).

In some states, officials have criticized higher education and demanded greater accountability on the parts of institutions (Bottum, 1988; Leatherman, 1989). In Virginia, however, leaders in the General Assembly as well as governors have long praised the quality and diversity of higher education in the Commonwealth. In spite of these attitudes, a general sense grew in the 1980s that activities ought to be underway that could help insure that public funds provided to higher education were being invested in programs that effectively transferred essential skills, knowledge, and attitudes to students enrolled at Virginia colleges and universities.

It was thought that such activities would provide valuable information in at least three respects:

- 1) as "consumer information" to improve the level and quality of information from which individuals could make choices about which institution to attend;

- 2) to gain a sense of whether students were obtaining the necessary skills and knowledge to enter the work force and contribute to the economic health of the Commonwealth;

and 3) to help determine whether students in a given program were learning the fundamentals of their discipline, acquiring the skills to apply their specialized knowledge, i.e. - writing, reading, thinking, research skills, and developing attitudes of tolerance, civic-mindedness, openness to new ideas, and critical thinking that are taken to characterize the educated mind (Bowen, 1977).

The Beginnings in Virginia

Serious discussions of a statewide student assessment policy for Virginia first took place within the General Professional Advisory Council (GPAC) in 1985. GPAC is composed of the presidents of the sixteen senior public institutions of higher education in Virginia, the Executive Director of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), and the Chancellor of the Virginia Community College System (VCCS). At that time there was growing, but still modest, interest within the state legislature in the assessment issue. Key legislators were familiar with the activities of national and regional education organizations, and SCHEV officials were asked to respond to questions from senators on how Virginia colleges and universities were addressing the issues raised in the 1984 National Institute of Education report Involvement in Learning. Most significantly, however, a senator indicated interest in the possibility of introducing legislation that might link assessment of student learning to institutional funding, along the lines of

the model advocated by the Southern Regional Education Board and used by Tennessee.

Initial discussion of the assessment issue led to a study resolution, Senate Joint Resolution 125 (1985), which called upon SCHEV to conduct a study of approaches to measuring student learning. The resulting report was accepted in 1986 as Senate Document 14. In it, SCHEV reiterated its long held contention that statewide testing was not an attractive option for Virginia. Instead, it was suggested that institutions be allowed to develop their own means of assessing student achievement. Legislators accepted this approach, and in Senate Joint Resolution 83 (1986) requested that all public institutions of higher education in Virginia "establish programs to measure student achievement." SCHEV was called upon to work with the institutions in developing guidelines for assessment programs, and to report the results of these programs in the biennial editions of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education.

From this basis SCHEV worked through the first half of 1987, in cooperation with public institutions of higher education, to establish guidelines intended to recognize both the diversity of Virginia's system of higher education and the desire to provide for some degree of consistency across the institutional plans that would be developed (Ewell & Boyer, 1988). At the same time SCHEV hoped to provide greater incentives to institutions to make progress on

assessment by linking these activities to the 1988-1990 biennium budget. In May 1987 Governor Gerald Baliles issued a guidance memorandum to the institutions regarding development of the 1988-1990 budget requests that gave SCHEV some of the fiscal leverage it had sought. In it, he indicated that institutional eligibility for incentive funding would depend, among other considerations, on having an institutional plan for student assessment approved by SCHEV by June 30, 1987.

Assessment in the Context of State Government

The goodwill of the Virginia legislature toward higher education is often noted by education officials and by legislators themselves. Legislators emphasize their unwillingness to dictate policy to institutions of higher education. In fact, SCHEV officials have indicated that the legislature has so far sought little more than assurance that assessment efforts would be undertaken in good faith (Davies, 1988a). The attitudes of legislators seem to be in harmony with those expressed by a senior SCHEV official who suggested that while the Council would be interested in looking at aggregate scores for institutions, there would be "no interest in data" *per se* (Miller, 1988a).

The ambivalence of many actors at the state level as to the intended uses of assessment data is due at least partly to their many possible applications, as well as the limited perspectives on the potential applications demonstrated by

most policy makers in Virginia. Detailed program information could be used for almost any of the legitimate functions of the state in regard to institutions of higher education. The contributions of higher education to the cultural, intellectual, and economic well being of Virginia's citizens are emphasized in legislative and executive documents. However, higher education may at the same time be seen to serve as a means of easing the flow of high school graduates into the work force, as a stimulus for the construction industry in the Commonwealth, or as a way in which elected officials may cultivate important constituent support (Keppell, 1988).

Advocates of assessment have touted it as a process that can inform decision and policy making in a number of important ways, including applications in improvement of academic programs and accountability to the state, improved student and faculty development opportunities, and improved institutional budget and planning processes (Astin, 1985; Banta & Moffett, 1987; Banta, 1986; Cross, 1988; Davies, 1988a, 1988b; El-Khawas, 1988; Ewell, 1985; Halpern, 1987; Hartle, 1986; Jones, 1984; Loacker & Mentkowski, 1986; National Governor's Association, 1986; Terenzini, 1987).

Past Difficulties in Using Assessment

In spite of the general favor with which assessment is viewed by many state officials and administrators in higher education (El-Khawas, 1988), past efforts to devise and

implement assessment programs at individual institutions have often met with mixed results. Institutional assessment activities have been described as "rarely related to a coherent, useful planning venture", resulting in a lack of well thought out rationales or technical expertise to see such efforts through in a meaningful way (Kells, 1980). Data collected by unenthusiastic faculty for obscure purposes may provide information of little utility.

Though testing addresses only a limited dimension of the intended outcomes of higher education, unsophisticated uses of standardized tests have resulted in attempts to interpret hopelessly confounded outcomes measures (Astin, 1987; Bowen, 1977; McConnell, 1981). Problems associated with the "value-added" approach to assessment have been thoroughly discussed in the literature (Terenzini, 1987).

Institutions have frequently been tempted to mimic other "successful" institutions, and in the push to proceed with assessment activities before they have been well thought out have run into situations in which unclear purposes, data with no clear use, and alienation of faculty caused difficulties in making local assessment efforts useful (Curry & Hagen, 1987; Ewell, 1987c; Kells, 1980). When the "value-added" model, as developed and used at Northeast Missouri State University, was promoted by enthusiastic elected officials for use by the other state institutions it resulted in serious problems linked to faculty resistance, uncertainty

of application in other settings, and unclear motivation for undertaking this kind of assessment effort (Ewell & Boyer, 1988; Lucas, 1988). Opposition from faculty has been found to be a common phenomenon (Astin & Ayala, 1987), particularly where retrenchment issues and program cutbacks have occurred. Faculty have tended to be suspicious of assessment as a veiled means of cutting back support, evaluating them, or undercutting their integrity and authority (Adelman, 1986; Lucas, 1988).

The "non-rational" nature of decision making in many organizations has been a source of difficulty in developing information systems based on input from assessment activities (Astin & Associates, 1987). Decision making in educational institutions often tends to follow the "garbage can" model described by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972). This model postulates that institutions are faced with constant flows of both problems and solutions, although the two are seldom related. That is, individuals within the system have "solutions" for which they seek an appropriate "problem." Decisions are made on at least two levels, or sets of premises. The first is a factual premise subject to empirical verification and amenable to the "facts". The second is a value premise not easily subject to testing or empirical confirmation or refutation (Simon, 1957). Management information systems that would arise out of assessment as described by Astin (1981) are necessarily subject to the

vicissitudes of the political reasoning and compromise that often characterize decision making in organizations (Allison, 1971). Dill (1984) found that academic decision makers tend to use information for its symbolic value and as a support for decisions already made

In Virginia, assessment has been taken seriously enough by state officials to commit public resources to its development and implementation. The potential impacts of assessment policy and uses of the data produced will affect and be affected by the dynamics of state government and its relationship with the system of public colleges and universities. This study investigated assessment in light of the dynamics of the relationship between the state and higher education in Virginia.

Statement of Purpose:

The purposes of this study were to

1) explain the origins of assessment policy in Virginia by integrating information from interviews, public documents, and other published materials;

2) determine the expectations of state policy makers regarding institutional data generated by assessment; and

3) review the implications of this policy and predict its future direction.

The research was guided by the following questions:

1. How did Virginia's assessment policy develop? What explanation of the origins of this policy is most plausible

in light of the evidence?

2. What do state policymakers expect from assessment? Are there specific uses planned for these data? What are the attitudes of key elected and appointed officials in Virginia government toward institutional reporting of assessment data to the state?

3. What are the implications of decision makers' expectations and intended uses of assessment data for future higher education policy directions in Virginia?

Significance:

The significance of the study arises out of a situation in which Virginia's student assessment policy, and the concept of student assessment in general, are subject to wide variations in interpretation and application by those who have responsibility for overseeing their implementation and use. Opponents view the Virginia policy as an unwarranted and ill-conceived intrusion on institutional autonomy that will result in undesirable homogenization of academic programs statewide and the unwarranted expansion of central authority. In contrast, supporters of Virginia's assessment policy see it as a boon to institutions that will stimulate curricular reform and renewal as well as new faculty development opportunities, without undue pressure or influence from state agencies or officials.

Whether those at the state or at the institutional level should best frame and interpret student assessment policy

and other measures that reach into the inner workings of institutions of higher education is a normative question that has been roundly debated. In Virginia, even the most vitriolic critics of assessment concede that institutions are accountable to the state. It is clear that the state has the prerogative to review the effectiveness and efficiency of publicly supported institutions of higher education. However, the line between accountability and intrusion is not amenable to precise definition (Newman, 1987).

The subject of the study is particularly significant in that it is an area of considerable interest to state governments and the public. Virginia's approach has provided an impetus for other states to step back from more prescriptive plans for student assessment (Ewell & Boyer, in press - b). As such, a detailed understanding of the development of this policy in Virginia is significant in primary political and practical terms, and provides a basis from which to review an important model of assessment policy that will be closely observed by other states.

Research Design:

The three research questions lent themselves to a qualitative research approach. Understanding of the policy environment from which assessment emerged was essential to clarify the current status and future developments of such activities on the part of the state. The qualitative approach emphasized the importance of the contexts in which decisions

and activities have occurred. Understanding the policy process from which assessment has emerged required the interpretation of facts, attitudes, and expectations. To address the first research question the viability of the following rival explanations of the origins and motivations behind student assessment in Virginia higher education were investigated. These explanations were developed from review of the literature and exploratory interviews with informants knowledgeable of the Virginia system of higher education:

1) Assessment developed as a logical state response to a "national mood" that demanded assessment as part of a greater degree of accountability to state officials on the part of higher education.

2) Assessment developed as part of a plan by an entrepreneurial institutional president and the director of SCHEV for the state to call for institutional information in such a way that it could be used to enhance institutional status and competitive position for the institution in seeking state resources, enhance the president's intra-institutional power, and at the same time increase SCHEV's influence within state government and the system of higher education.

3) Assessment was adopted to provide output measures that had been sought for years by state planners who have established a series of input measures for higher education over the past decade. Acceptable output measures permit the application of a general evaluation model, described in the

Commonwealth Planning and Budgeting Manual, to questions regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions of higher education.

4) Assessment was adopted as a result of the desire of powerful operatives in the Legislature and in the state planning bureaucracy to obtain data with which to justify desired, but perhaps controversial, actions regarding the status of certain state institutions of higher education.

5) The adoption of assessment exemplified the "garbage can" process described by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) and Kingdon (1984). The interest in obtaining more accurate input/output data on higher education is long standing in state government. Input measures were established over time as part of the budgeting process. Output measures were desired, but were problematic to find and implement without outcry from the higher education community. When calls for student assessment emerged as a national trend it presented a "problem" to which some state planners and perhaps legislators had long had a "solution": evaluation of the effectiveness of academic programs in Virginia's postsecondary institutions. With assessment in place, higher education could be made subject to the same general evaluation model applied to other state agencies.

Certain assumptions were made and delimitations observed in the conduct of this study:

a) Political operatives may be unwilling to discuss or

describe assessment and state planning in higher education in details beyond political assurances and rhetoric; however, the data from interviews are taken to be that a subject said or did not say something, not exclusively what they said.

b) If Explanation 4 proved to be one of the underlying motives for the collection of assessment data, that is, that the documentation of poor output by certain institutions was to justify closing or reducing the scope of those institutions, assumption a) may be even more the case.

c) If explanation 3) holds, then indications of previous efforts at the centralization of planning for higher education should be traceable through state planning documents, and the recollections, observations, and perceptions of state planners and political operatives.

The study did not include analysis of the Virginia Community College System. The very different structure of the community college system and differences in mission and curricula across two and four year institutions led to a decision to focus on the state and its relationship with the public four year colleges and universities of Virginia.

Interviews and review of documents and other published materials also provided the basis from which the second and third research questions were addressed. Interview questions for subjects within SCHEV, the institutions of higher education, the legislative branch, and the executive branch

are outlined in Appendices 5 through 8. The questions provided a framework for extensive interviews with individuals involved with the development and ultimate applications of assessment and state planning for higher education in Virginia. A list of individuals interviewed appears in Appendix 2.

Extensive interviews with key actors at the state level and within institutions provided substantial information from which to evaluate the accuracy of each of the proposed explanations. Those interviewed were identified primarily through a process of identification by other principals - a networking or "snowball" approach. This established a basis for a substantive study of the political and governmental processes by which the Virginia model for assessment developed and evolved.

Definitions of Terms

The national discussion of student assessment in higher education has seen the frequent use of a number of key terms. For the sake of addressing the issues under consideration with a common language, the following terms are defined.

Assessment. From the wording of Senate Joint Resolution 83 (1986) assessment is taken to mean in Virginia "procedures and programs consistent with each institution's mission and educational objectives to measure student achievement." Optimally these procedures are expected to be

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."

Accountability. State authorities believe that institutions of higher education have a responsibility to explain to the public, and particularly to elected or appointed representatives of the public, what they are doing and how they are doing it; they are concerned with the quality of the outcomes of education in relation to the state's investment of resources. Gutmann (1988) has suggested that accountability means making the standards and contentions of the institution open to public discussion. The Virginia assessment plan asks essentially that institutions will (1) make clear what they think they are doing; (2) conduct studies to ascertain, to the degree possible, the success of their efforts to do what they think they should be doing; and (3) report broad summaries of these activities and findings to SCHEV.

Student Achievement. The degree of student mastery of defined skills, knowledge, and attitudes is taken to be an indication of student achievement. It is assumed that achievement results from, or is at least enhanced by, an active learning process involving instruction and educa-

tional activity.

Student Outcomes. Astin and Associates (1987) have referred to student outcomes as "the wide range of phenomena that can be influenced by the educational experience." Outcomes generally refer to the skills, knowledge, or characteristics a student takes from the college experience. As Astin and Bowen have pointed out, "there is simply no way to determine whether outcomes are a reflection of institutional impact, entering levels of competence, or both" (Astin, 1987; Bowen, 1977). Employers or graduate schools would be expected to be particularly interested in outcomes, since they are concerned with knowledge and skills people bring to the job, and have no need to be concerned with how or where they acquired such knowledge or skills.

Virginia legislative documents favor the use of the term "achievement", while SCHEV assessment guidelines frequently use the term "outcomes" to refer to what seems to be intended as the same construct.

Effectiveness. In regard to student outcomes or achievement in higher education, concern with institutional effectiveness refers to the degree to which students actually obtain the skills, knowledge, and attitudes that are the intended and expected results of post-secondary educational experience. The Commonwealth Planning and Budgeting Manual (1986) defines effectiveness as "the extent to which programs and/or subprograms are meeting the needs or condi-

tions which the programs and/or subprograms were created to address" (p. I-6-6)

Efficiency. Often described simply as a ratio between inputs and outputs, efficiency is taken in a general sense as the maximization of output at a defined level of input or achievement of a standard level of output at a minimum input (Bowen, 1980; Wise, 1979). From this standpoint, increased efficiency means producing or achieving more with given levels of investment of time and resources or producing or achieving at the same level with smaller investments of time and resources. Efficient operation includes production or achievement of what is valued by society or its representatives (Green, 1980). Therefore, efficiency in the context of higher education refers to the inputs of resources and time invested in the achievement or "production" of students who demonstrate levels and kinds of knowledge, skills, and attitudes intended and expected as a result of fulfillment of program completion requirements within institutions of higher education. The Commonwealth Planning and Budgeting Manual (1986) defines efficiency as "the extent to which services are being provided in the most economical manner possible" (p. I-6-6).

Chapter Two

Higher Education and the State

The relationship between institutions of higher education and government has been affected by a number of developments in society at large in this century. Rising costs and expectations for all public enterprises have signalled increasing levels of interest on the parts of public officials in the effectiveness and efficiency of higher education. These interests have given impetus to ongoing debate over issues concerning needs for institutional accountability and their counterpoints in institutional requirements for autonomy.

Institutional Accountability

Higher education expanded dramatically in size and scope in the three decades following World War II (Edwards, 1980; Ewell, 1985c; Resnick & Goulden, 1987). This rapid growth brought with it pressures not simply to provide more spaces for sheer numbers of students, but also amplified questions of access for minority groups, women, and those of low socio-economic status. The pressures of rapid growth also raised questions of how to insure and maintain the quality and coherence of academic programs. The greater presence of colleges and universities in the mainstream of American society also promoted the expansion of institutional services to a broader range of constituencies, making higher

education more costly and more visible, thus compelling it to bear the heightened expectations of more people than ever before (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Edwards, 1980; McConnell, 1981; Tollett, 1970; Working Party, 1986). Criticism of higher education in regard to both access and quality led to calls for reform and for greater accountability to the public and its representatives in government. The drive for accountability also grew out of the desire of state governments to know more about what institutions of higher education did, how they managed their affairs, and how they spent the monies they were appropriated. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, accountability was concerned largely with cost studies, fiscal auditing, including performance and management accounting information, and expectations that higher education demonstrate its worth and justify its expanding public budgets in the face of limited public resources (Balderson, 1974; Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Lawrence & Green, 1980; Lawrence, Weathersby, & Patterson, 1970; Mingle, 1983). Even the staunchest defenders of the autonomy of higher education conceded that the dependence of public institutions on public funding made them subject to greater public scrutiny, particularly in light of competing social needs. (Bender, 1977; Lawrence & Green, 1980; Resnick & Goulden, 1987).

Concerns about the quality of higher education and growing skepticism about its ability to police itself also

fueled the determination of state legislators and other officials to obtain a greater degree of information about and control over higher education (Bottum, 1988; Ewell, 1987; Folger, 1977; Mingle, 1983; Tollett, 1970). This set the stage for continuing legislative involvement and was interpreted by many as an expression of public dissatisfaction with what was being done on the campuses of public colleges and universities (Mingle, 1983; Nowlan, 1976).

Among the ways states sought to better oversee higher education were continual efforts to shape it in the likeness of other government agencies by establishing central coordinating or governing boards and creating uniform budgeting and reporting systems (McConnell, 1981; Newman, 1987). In spite of the diversity that is the hallmark of higher education in the United States, state governments have tended to employ blanket policies in the effort to rationalize and systematize higher education (Bender, 1977).

The evolving relationship between higher education and state governments was strongly affected by the growth of the states' capacities to monitor and analyze the activities and functions of colleges and universities. At the same time that increased analytic capabilities and more searching attitudes were coming to the fore in state governments, principles of public accountability were being more rigorously defined for all public agencies (Comptroller General, 1974; Herbert, Killough, & Steiss, 1984). Better trained and

larger staffs and the spread of computer technology permitted far more sophisticated data analyses.

In addition, since the 1960s redistricting, reflecting urban growth and changing demographics, has altered the composition of state legislatures. One result has been an increased willingness on the parts of legislators and their staffs to investigate all aspects of public higher education and greater confidence in their capacities to make wide ranging education policy (Lawrence & Green, 1980; McConnell, 1981; Mingle, 1983; Newman, 1987). Beyond the legislature, state bureaucracies have also become more assertive in their dealings with higher education, in many cases because they reason that colleges and universities should not be permitted to avoid the requirements that govern other state agencies (Leatherman, 1989; Newman, 1987).

In higher education, the late 1960s saw the development of the Western Interstate Consortium on Higher Education (WICHE) and later the National Center for Higher Education Management Systems (NCHEMS), organizations devoted to the more systematic and rational management and governance of higher education (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976). These organizations epitomized what had become a powerful force in state - higher education relationships: the desire to eliminate waste and duplication and the belief that operations could be improved through application of systems management theory to institutions and statewide systems of higher education

(Mingle, 1983).

Institutional Autonomy

Whenever a state government mandates review of the inner workings of institutions of higher education, long standing tensions between the dynamics of institutional autonomy and public accountability may surface (Duryea, 1981). Colleges and universities are often wary of state directives that affect their internal functions or activities. Of particular concern to institutions is maintenance of educational programs, or specifically, what has been called the "academic core" of the university. This core is composed of what is taught and researched, who teaches and conducts research, who is admitted to study, and what academic standards are maintained (Bender, 1977; Newman, 1987; Sweezy v. New Hampshire, 354 U.S. 234, 1957). It has been suggested that this list should include assessment of academic performance as well as control over the conduct of research and communication of its results (Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1982).

What constitutes inappropriate intrusion by the state into the affairs of institutions of higher education is difficult to define in any consistent manner, since such a definition varies by context and perspective. A recent review of these issues sought to define the parameters of both appropriate and inappropriate involvement in higher education by government. Appropriate public policy for higher

education was summarized as involving broad goal setting, resource allocation, reasonable expectations for institutional accountability, and encouragement of those involved in institutional governance. Inappropriate intrusion was seen as marked by efforts to interfere in the affairs of colleges and universities to serve questionable ends or even to serve appropriate ends through questionable means (Newman, 1987).

Three kinds of inappropriate state intrusion, not mutually exclusive and often interrelated, have been described:

1) bureaucratic, most commonly characterized by unnecessarily elaborate state or system requirements or processes that interfere with the core functions of institutions (e.g., Commission on the Future of the State University, 1985);

2) ideological, involving interference in the affairs of colleges and universities solely on the basis of ideology (e.g., Newman, 1987); and

3) political, involving interference in the affairs of higher education for the sake of promoting the political interests of some group or individual in government (e.g., Jaschik, 1988).

Although state intrusions have been brought about for a variety of reasons, it has been indicated that inappropriate intrusions have often been precipitated when institutions attempt to circumvent the established governance process or

pursue ambitions beyond their stated missions to achieve campus goals. Intrusions have frequently been a result of institutions' inadequate responses to real state needs (Newman, 1987). Other studies of the politics of higher education suggested that colleges and universities have sometimes precipitated state intervention through internecine squabbling that delayed or prevented effective action to address identified state needs (Bender, 1977).

Active state involvement in higher education has not always been perceived as inappropriately intrusive. Some experienced students of higher education have concluded that colleges and universities, if left to their own devices, tend toward self absorption and self interest in neglect of the public interest (Ewell, 1985c; Newman, 1987). Similarly, a Big Ten university president declared that in his experience most governmental initiatives had been beneficial, in spite of the concerns of the institutions (Magrath, quoted in Bender, 1977). A review of governmental regulation that directly or indirectly affected institutions of higher education led Edwards (1980) to conclude that concerns over government intervention infringing on the autonomy of higher education were largely overstated. Bailey perhaps best summarized this line of thinking:

The public interest would not... be served if the academy were to enjoy untroubled immunity. Nor could the public interest be served by the academy's being subjected to an

intimate surveillance. Whatever our current discomforts because of a sense that the state is crowding us a bit, the underlying tension is benign (1975, p. 1).

Generalization concerning the relationship between the state and higher education is difficult beyond broad comparisons. Like political systems, systems of higher education vary widely from state to state, and none can be fairly characterized as typical (Bottum, 1988; Newman, 1987; Pettit, 1987). Even within each state, higher education is not a monolithic entity, but rather an agglomeration of sometimes very different institutions that are often not united in political goals and strategy and sometimes may even work against each other (Bender, 1977). These substantial differences within and among states translate into important variations in approaches to higher education policy generally, and assessment of student learning specifically (Ewell & Boyer, 1988; Ewell, 1987c).

Higher Education and Social Policy

Education has been described as a continuous enterprise in which higher education cannot be examined in terms of student learning and achievement without also looking at elementary and secondary education (Adelman, 1986; Bennett, 1984b; Ewell, 1987a; SCHEV, 1974a). Assessment of educational achievement became a feature of elementary and secondary education programs in many states, including Virginia, in the 1960s and 1970s (Virginia, 1985a). This was

interpreted by some as evidence that states might expand such activities to the post-secondary level (Ewell, 1987a; Folger, 1977; Resnick, 1987).

However, there are some important dissimilarities between K-12 education and higher education that discourage such expansion. Perhaps most notably, uniformity of educational programs and quality statewide has been actively promoted in public elementary and secondary schools; this is quite the contrary in most state systems of higher education, and particularly in Virginia, where diversity has been encouraged for many decades (Lawrence & Green, 1980). Furthermore, all states have mandatory attendance laws that make public schooling universal. Most students and their parents have little choice as to which or what kind of elementary or secondary school will be attended; this situation is again contrary to that in higher education. The differences in student and system characteristics limit the power of the K-12 -higher education analogy.

The growth of demands for greater accountability in higher education was more than mere obtrusiveness or a desire for power on the part of government. Rising demands for consumer protection also promoted desires for more information about the quality of higher education (Cartter, 1966; Stark, 1977), particularly in light of the growth of student loan and grant programs (Edwards & Nordin, 1979). The right of the public to know more about institutions,

including how and how well they were run, was given greater emphasis (Jones, 1985). The importance of higher education to regional economic development also stimulated state involvement in seeking to monitor and promote the quality of institutions of higher education (Conrad & Pratt, 1985; Ewell, 1985c; Matthews & Norgaard, 1984; Newman, 1987; Virginia State Chamber of Commerce, 1963).

The decades of the 1960s and 1970s saw higher education affected by a number of far reaching Federal policies and changing social attitudes. Access became a priority as the states took responsibility to ensure that the benefits of participation in higher education were equitably available and distributed (Bowen, 1977; Ewell, 1985; Southern Regional Education Board, 1985). Higher education was transformed from a privilege or opportunity for a relative minority of Americans to an entitlement, supported by such legislation as the Civil Rights Act of 1964, the Higher Education Act of 1965 and the Education Amendments Acts of 1972 and 1976 (Edwards & Nordin, 1979; Ewell, 1985c). These legislative acts aimed at eliminating discriminatory practices, provided large amounts of aid to both students and institutions, and as a consequence generally promoted the development of greater central planning and data collection by the states (Lawrence & Green, 1980).

Furthermore, major changes in the course of studies preferred by undergraduates led to dislocations in the tradi-

tional arts and sciences curriculum (Davies, 1984; Ewell, 1985c; Rollins, 1984; Working Party, 1986) that also stimulated questions regarding the relevance and quality of the undergraduate curriculum. The value of a college education in securing career and material success was also questioned, leading to some doubts about public investments in higher education that were not subject to close examination to determine their benefits (Lawrence & Green, 1980; Rollins, 1984; Working Party, 1986).

The Emergence of a New Concept of Accountability

While budgetary accountability was greatly strengthened in most states through the course of the 1970s, serious questions were increasingly raised as to the propriety of using accounting methods and cost effectiveness approaches to review the essential purposes and outcomes of higher education (Balderston, 1974; Bowen, 1974; McConnell, 1981; Mingle, 1983). While institutions generally accepted the need for public accountability, many questioned the appropriateness of the methods used to achieve it (Danforth, 1973; Lorenz, 1983).

A standard work on resource use in higher education published in 1971 had defined student attainment in terms of credit hours (O'Neill, 1971). In the 1980s such definitions were widely held unsatisfactory. The customary reliance of American higher education on time measures as units of achievement left it vulnerable to charges of grade inflation

and devalued degrees (Adelman, 1986; Harris, 1986).

Although the development of acceptable criteria for program review has been a politically volatile process for many states (Barak & Berdahl, 1978; Lawrence & Green, 1980; Mingle, 1978), state coordinating agencies have most commonly used four general criteria in evaluating higher education programs:

- 1) productivity, in terms of numbers of graduates;
- 2) program costs;
- 3) the need for the program and its compatibility with institutional mission; and
- 4) program quality (Barak & Berdahl, 1978; Barak, 1977).

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 performance, or job and educational success after graduation (Barak, 1982; Ewell, 1985c; Working Party, 1986). In Virginia, SCHEV has over the years developed criteria and techniques to look at productivity, program costs, and need for programs in the context of institutional mission. In spite of noting the need for a consistent approach to the evaluation of program quality, SCHEV had not been able to develop one (SCHEV, 1972a, 1973, 1981). Assessment may provide data and help define criteria that will permit much more searching reviews of the quality of academic programs within institutions (Davies, 1987; Ewell,

in Magner, 1989).

The focus of the accountability movement from the 1960s through the 1970s was not exclusively on the analysis of budgetary efficiency. The quality of teaching and learning also received critical attention (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Lawrence & Green, 1980), encouraged by reports of declining standardized test scores (Ewell, 1985c; Hartle, 1986; SCHEV, 1986b); public officials' doubts about the nature and quality of instruction at public institutions of higher education (Jaschik, 1985); accounts in the popular press that colleges were involved in price gouging, elitist non-accountability, and graduating underprepared students (Harris, 1986; Hartle, 1986); proclamations of the lack of student interest in learning (Hacker, 1986); concerns over a lack of quality controls in higher education (Bloom, 1982); emphasis on research that was declared to have undermined the quality of undergraduate instruction (Bonham, 1980); and reports of the effects of a permissive culture on such ills as weak curricula, falling standards, and lower expectations (Austin & Garber, 1982).

As the quality and coherence of undergraduate education have been criticized, reforms have been urged from various quarters (Chandler, 1986; Ewell, 1985c; Lawrence & Green, 1980; Resnick & Goulden, 1987; Rollins, 1984; Southern Regional Education Board, 1985; Working Party 1986). A series of reports in the mid-1980s from national and

regional organizations excoriated higher education for not providing evidence of its relevance, coherence, and value and emphasized the beliefs that serious reforms were needed in the nation's colleges and universities (Association of American Colleges, 1985; Bennett, 1984a; National Governors' Association, 1986; National Institute of Education, 1985; Southern Regional Education Board, 1985). Through the 1970s and into the 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. These were the concerns that in the 1980s came to shape state mandates for the assessment of student learning (Bottum, 1988; Ewell, 1985c). Epitomizing this thinking was the call in a 1988 report of the Southern Regional Education Board for "the quality and effectiveness of all colleges and universities [to] be regularly assessed, with particular emphasis on the performance of undergraduate students" (SREB, 1988, p. 14).

Assessment of Student Learning

Against this backdrop, assessment of student learning emerged as an item on many state policy agendas. Institutions of higher education have been asked by state authorities to address expectations for evidence and assurances about the fundamental role they fill in society (Jones & Ewell, 1987). Although these expectations are sometimes

vague, they seek to stimulate improvement and to engage institutions in active review of what they do, how well, and if there are discrepancies, what they ought to be doing to improve.

Proponents have described a wide array of benefits that accrue from assessment programs. Assessment of student learning has been described as an opportunity to focus renewed attention on teaching and learning as a primary mission of higher education (Daughdrill, 1988) and has been recommended as a means of providing useful feedback to students, faculty, and the institution as a whole on the process and products of education (Astin & Associates, 1987; Astin, 1980; Banta & Moffett, 1987; Ewell, 1987; Halpern, 1987).

Assessment has had a significant impact on some institutions that have made it an integral part of their programs. Northeast Missouri State University has used assessment of student learning since the 1970s as a way to redefine and revitalize its mission and gain greater support within state government (Ewell, 1985c; Lucas, 1988; McClain & Krueger, 1985). Alverno College has integrated broad-based assessment processes into its curriculum, giving it a uniquely defined undergraduate program (Ewell, 1985c; Hartle, 1986; Locker, Cromwell, & O'Brien, 1986; Mentkowski & Doherty, 1983; Mentkowski & Locker, 1985). The University of Tennessee at Knoxville has used student assessment data to help

shape changes in curriculum and increase faculty involvement with students (Banta, 1985; Ewell, 1985c; Hartle, 1986).

Although assessment researchers have emphasized that assessment activities be carefully planned and developed with some coherent theory or strategy by which the process is integrated into the program and mission of each institution (Astin & Associates, 1987; Kells, 1981; Kinnick, 1985), this has not always been the case. In haste to proceed with the mechanics of assessment, institutions have sometimes found themselves in situations in which the first credible approach within budgetary means was adopted (Kells, 1981). The "law of the instrument" (Kaplan, 1964) has proven powerful in letting available methods dictate the object of inquiry in assessment (Curry & Hagen, 1987; Ewell, 1987c, 1989).

It has also been charged that assessment adds an additional burden on administration and faculty members without additional compensation, time to cope with it, or clear evidence that it is a needed or worthwhile activity (Adelman, 1986; Kells, 1981; Kerschner, 1987). When administrative or reporting requirements are seen as unreasonable or particularly onerous, administrators may spend a great deal of time and effort in trying to circumvent them or blunt their effects (Commission on the Future of the State University, 1985; Mingle, 1983; Sloan Commission, 1980; Stone, 1988). State governments might conceivably apply assessment infor-

mation to any of their functions in regard to higher education. The state's higher education agenda includes broad areas involving the budget and resources, student access and aid, the quality and efficiency of academic programs, and general interests which require attention to the needs of state economic development and support for activities that enrich the cultural environment. Better information on the quality of educational programs and processes within universities can provide a more substantial basis than a least cost rationale from which to make resource allocation and other crucial decisions (Anthony & Reece, 1975; Ewell 1985c; Herbert, Killough, & Steiss, 1984; Jones & Ewell, 1987).

Fears of the potential for state mandated "quality controls" to erode institutional autonomy, homogenize academic programs, and stifle faculty innovation have been expressed (Miller, in Lucas, 1988; O'Neill, in Hartle, 1986). Close state control has been seen to inhibit local initiative, imagination, and motivation for long term improvements (Mingle, 1983). In Virginia, the principles followed by SCHEV since its inception have generally revolved around the importance of diversity and institutional autonomy. Yet, within Virginia colleges and universities, a number of observers have found a significant contradiction between this rhetoric and the demand for reform indicated by the assessment mandate (Ewell & Boyer, in print - b).

Virginia and Higher Education

The Birth and Growth of the State Council

Discussion of a central coordinating agency for higher education had been discussed in Virginia at various points through the course of the twentieth century, first in 1912, and again in 1928, 1947, and 1951 (General Assembly Commission on Higher Education, 1974; Kellogg, 1974). In 1956 these discussions came to fruition with the creation of the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV). Its initial statutory duties included coordination, program approval, and review of institutional information related to budget requests (Kellogg, 1974).

SCHEV's early years found it in an ambivalent role. There was little interest within the Legislature in creating a powerful governing board for Virginia colleges and universities, and the Council received little consideration or cooperation. It was held in somewhat low regard by the General Assembly, the Division of the Budget, and particularly by the institutions of higher education, who often sought to circumvent it. Into the early 1960s, SCHEV was propped up primarily by the support of the governors (Kellogg, 1974).

Although SCHEV expanded its role in the early 1960s in terms of collecting institutional data, at the same time the General Assembly denied the Council authority to review institutional capital budgets, or to expend funds for coordination of institutional budgets. This situation was strongly criticized by the state sponsored Higher Education

Study Commission report (1965) and SCHEV's role in reviewing institutional budgets was restored in 1966 (Kellogg, 1974).

From its earliest days SCHEV sought uniform data from institutions to aid in its coordination tasks (SCHEV, 1960). It began with an eye to uniform annual financial reports from public institutions of higher education. It also suggested that institutions adopt a uniform budgeting plan, as well as a uniform reporting system to share educational data. The 1961 Biennial Report called for specific institutional studies of "teaching loads, curriculum organization, non-instructional duties and research activities" (p. 5) to improve opportunities for more effective teaching and service. In addition, cost studies were recommended to look at major program expenditures for planning purposes and the identification of "uneconomical practices in instructional programs" such as course proliferation, low student-teacher ratios, below average class sizes, or unusually high overhead (pp. 5-6). By the beginning of the 1964-65 fiscal year a uniform system of financial data reporting from the institutions to SCHEV was in place.

The 1965 Commission report suggested an expanded role for SCHEV, recommending not only that SCHEV be the budget agency for higher education, but that it should be the "chief advisory body" to the governor and legislature regarding higher education budgeting, policy, and planning (Virginia Higher Education Study Commission, 1965a).

SCHEV's status within state government continued to improve through the mid and late 1960s with support from the governor and key legislators (Kellogg, 1974).

SCHEV and Institutional Effectiveness and Efficiency

Like its counterparts in other states, SCHEV has emphasized the need to measure and improve efficiency and effectiveness in higher education (SCHEV, 1960; 1967a; 1972a; 1973; 1981). The 1965 Study Commission's recommendations, as well as the Governor's designation of SCHEV as the responsible coordinating agency for programs available to Virginia colleges and universities under the Higher Education Act of 1965 (SCHEV, 1966), resulted in the 1966 development of an "Integrated Data Gathering and Analysis System" that sought to collect relevant information in seven areas: classes taught, students, programs, faculty and staff, finance, physical facilities, and "other miscellaneous information" (Kellogg, 1974; SCHEV, 1967c). The first edition of The Virginia Plan for Higher Education, published in 1967, discussed the need for information from institutions that would form a basis for better state planning and coordination (SCHEV, 1967a). Later, the Council exhorted institutions to demonstrate not only that their activities were "productive and of service to Virginia", but also "that these activities [were] carefully managed and coordinated" (SCHEV, 1974a, p. 35). Cost accounting information was sought to conduct analyses of instructional costs. Such analyses were described

as one of the few ways in which officials could interpret variations in instructional costs between institutions of varying size and mission (SCHEV, 1967c, p. 1). SCHEV declared their information gathering essential to state efforts to plan and finance higher education (SCHEV, 1972c).

As part of the drive for efficiency, SCHEV has sought to identify and eliminate "unproductive" academic programs. A 1971 study reported almost 100 graduate programs that had "low or no productivity", over the previous five years (SCHEV, 1974a). In 1974 SCHEV requested and was granted statutory authority to eliminate unproductive programs where they were identified (Davies, 1987; SCHEV, 1973). Nonproductivity was defined in the Code of Virginia in terms of "the number of degrees granted, the number of students served... and budgetary considerations" (Section 23-9.6:1(f)). Productivity reviews have remained a staple SCHEV activity through the 1980s.

Expansion of SCHEV's Role

In the early 1970s a national trend toward more powerful central governing boards was noted in The Virginia Plan. This trend was identified as a response to the needs of legislators for greater accountability on the part of higher education in the face of severe constraints on public resources (SCHEV, 1972a). In 1972, it was proposed in the General Assembly that the recently established Commission on Higher Education study the idea of replacing SCHEV and the

Department of Community Colleges with a more powerful governing board (Kellogg, 1974). Subsequently, SCHEV called for statutory authority to coordinate all state affairs pertaining to higher education in Virginia, arguing that greater centralization of budget review and coordination was still better than the loss of institutional autonomy under a single governing board (SCHEV, 1974a).

The Report of the General Assembly Higher Education Study Commission (1974) and the accompanying Shaner Report on the management of the public colleges and universities influenced the legislature to increase SCHEV's responsibilities as an advisory and coordinating body (Berdahl, 1977). But SCHEV's powers were not expanded to the degree suggested by the management consultants who prepared the Shaner Report, which had called for the establishment of a powerful state level board with broad authority to govern institutions (General Assembly Commission on Higher Education, 1974). The opinion of the Commission was that SCHEV had not been successful in facilitating state coordination of higher education adequate to provide efficiently for the needs of Virginians (General Assembly Commission on Higher Education, 1974).

The Commission recommended that SCHEV, as the state planning agency for higher education, be granted authority:

- 1) to undertake more comprehensive data collection and reporting;

- 2) to oversee academic programs and institutional missions;
- 3) to determine enrollment levels; and
- 4) to review capital outlay and operating budgets.

These additional responsibilities were to come along with more positions and better pay for SCHEV staff.

Although the subsequent expansion of SCHEV's authority was not as far reaching as the recommendations of the Commission report, the General Assembly did respond by increasing SCHEV's coordinating powers. It gave the Council more responsibility for academic program approval, enrollment projections, long-range planning, and budget review, including authority to develop a comprehensive system to collection uniform data and to develop policies, formulae, and guidelines for institutional use in preparing budget requests (Code of Virginia, Section 23-9.6:1; SCHEV, 1977c). SCHEV was also called upon "insofar as practicable", to "preserve the individuality, traditions and sense of responsibility of the respective institutions" (Code of Virginia, Section 23-9.6:1(n)). In 1975 the Governor designated SCHEV as the responsible commission for all activities referred to or imposed under the Educational Amendments Act of 1972, and later the act of the same name in 1976. These new responsibilities required additional data collection and analysis to support Federal reporting requirements and the increased planning and administrative activities of the State Council

(SCHEV, 1977c).

In 1976 SCHEV introduced the IEP (Information Exchange Procedures), a sweeping data reporting requirement that placed an admittedly heavy burden on institutions. Institutional complaints and difficulties, questions regarding the quality of the data provided, as well as a 1987 Task Force on Paperwork Reduction report, ultimately led to the suspension of collection of IEP data in the late 1980s (Etkin, 1989; Sheldon, 1987). However, in 1989 SCHEV continued to collect a broad spectrum of institutional data on a routine basis and several special reports from institutions each year (Sheldon, 1987, 1989). In addition, Davies (1987) has proposed regular publication of institutional profiles based on some of the data collected that would include information on enrollments, demographics, SAT scores, finances, retention rates, remediation, degrees conferred, graduation rates, entrance requirements, scholarships, courses taught by GTA's, and profiles of graduates.

SCHEV and the Higher Education Budget

As a key instrument in the formulation and execution of public higher education policy, the budget has long been a focus of SCHEV's efforts. Until 1968, budgeting for higher education in Virginia was done on an incremental basis. But for the 1968-1970 biennial budget, the Division of the Budget had begun development of a system of general formulae to help establish operating expense guidelines for institutions

of higher education (Department of Planning & Budget, 1985; Kellogg, 1974). This guideline or formula budgeting approach was initiated during Governor Albertis Harrison's administration in the mid-1960s as a way of dealing with the growth of higher education and the continuing struggle between SCHEV and the Division of the Budget over the expanding higher education budget (Kellogg, 1974).

The set of formulae and guidelines that have evolved as "Appendix M" grew out of the 1968 guidelines (Department of Planning & Budget, 1985; Kellogg, 1974). The 1974 report of the General Assembly Commission on Higher Education described the guidelines as the expression of "educational needs in financial terms." Although the budget guidelines for higher education are not written into law or binding on the General Assembly in making appropriations, they have been generally recognized and accepted by that body (Department of Planning & Budget, 1985).

In spite of SCHEV's expanded role in reviewing institutional budget requests and the state's commitment to a more comprehensive approach to budgeting and planning, the Governor's Guidance Package for the 1980-82 biennium, in criticism reminiscent of the 1974 Commission report, noted "little policy direction" in the growth of state expenditures for higher education. The rapid expansion of colleges and universities was criticized as having occurred "without the benefit of any budget guidelines and management systems

designed to monitor their growth and make them set priorities within limited resources" (p. 11). SCHEV's limited influence over the higher education budget, an important tool in shaping policy, was coupled with expectations that the agency should set the higher education policy agenda. High expectations and limited authority continued to be conditions of SCHEV's existence into the 1980s.

Through the 1970s the guideline approach to the higher education budget had been refined and applied with some consistency. Since funding was largely tied to enrollments, and enrollments at almost every institution were growing, funding increased and the process proceeded relatively smoothly. As the economy weakened and enrollments began to level off in the early 1980s, mounting concerns regarding the connection of funding to enrollments emerged (Davies, 1984, 1987; Robb, 1984; Robinson, 1984; SCHEV, 1981). SCHEV recommended changes in funding approaches for higher education, 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).

In the continuing quest for efficient and effective uses of public dollars, one of the changes introduced into public budgeting in Virginia in the 1970s was a state commitment to a system of modified program budgeting. The first official mention of this approach occurred in a 1966 memo from Gover-

nor Harrison's office that requested agencies to present budget requests by program or similar activities. A 1970 resolution calling for the expansion of program budgeting efforts in Virginia failed in the General Assembly (Kellogg, 1974), but before the end of the decade the program concept had gained the support of a majority of legislators. In the 1977 Virginia Plan, SCHEV observed that the development of uniform budgeting and accounting procedures among Virginia colleges and universities had well prepared institutions to take on the requirements of program budgeting (SCHEV, 1977c).

Program budgeting was intended as a budgeting system that would center on agency programs, or logically related functions. It was defined by the Department of Planning and Budget as having six components:

- (1) identification of common statewide efforts in a program structure;
- (2) identification and statement of program goals and objectives;
- (3) establishment of program priorities;
- (4) appropriation of funds according to programs;
- (5) monitoring and evaluation of programs; and
- (6) projection of revenues and expenditures beyond one biennium to permit better planning (Department of Planning & Budget, 1986, p. I-6-13).

One of the key components of this approach to budgeting for

higher education was evaluation of programs as a regular part of the budgeting and planning process.

Use of the Budget to Shape the Higher Education Agenda

The gathering interest in stepping back from a strictly formula funded approach to higher education and the state's commitment to a system of program budgeting coincided with growing national dissatisfaction with formula funding. It was held that this approach tended to have a "leveling" influence on institutions since the criteria for such funding concentrated on measures of inputs and activity, e.g. -- enrollment, faculty activity, square feet of laboratory space -- and provided no incentive for qualitative change or improvement (Brinkman, 1984; Ewell, 1985c). Public officials expressed interest in linking funding with institutional efforts to improve undergraduate learning (National Governor's Association, 1986).

The shift in funding patterns in Virginia provided SCHEV with more opportunities to use the budget to promote institutional change by providing incentives to institutions that responded to state priorities (Davies, 1987). These changes were envisioned as a far reaching reordering of institutional agendas that would require "fundamental reallocation of effort and resources" (Davies, 1987, Ch. 2, p. 6). In fact, such uses of funding have exemplified SCHEV's "carrot and stick" approach to shaping policy within the limits of Virginia political tradition, and specifically to effecting

assessment policy. Since 1985 a strong Virginia economy and the support of legislators have allowed SCHEV to provide significant funding for assessment activities, in addition to continued support for ongoing institutional activities and functions, (Ewell & Boyer, in print - a). Thus, long term interest in academic quality, a more assertive posture on the part of SCHEV, and new approaches to using budgetary tools to shape institutional behavior set the stage for the development of assessment policy in Virginia.

Chapter Three

Methodology

Purpose of the Study

Virginia's plan for student assessment in public colleges and universities signalled a "new wave" among states mandating assessment (Henry, 1988). Other states seemed to follow the institution-centered approach that Virginia set in motion (Ewell & Boyer, in press - b). The significance of the course charted by Virginia for the 39 Virginia public colleges and universities is obvious. But other states and institutions are also watching to see if central efforts to spur institution specific, internal review and reform can be effective without being heavy handed.

Interest in calling upon institutions to conduct activities to assess student learning emerged as a major policy initiative in Virginia in the 1980s. As it developed, the assessment policy received strong support from the Governor, the Secretary of Education, the Department of Planning and Budget, the State Council of Higher Education, and the General Assembly. While top elected and appointed state officials solidly supported the state mandate, assessment of student learning was promoted as a policy to be developed by institutions for their use and benefit. This situation presented a prime opportunity to investigate the processes by which this policy emerged from the public agenda

as a program mandated from the top down, but put forward as a stimulus for reform rather than a command for prescribed change.

The purposes of this study were threefold: to explain the origins of assessment policy in Virginia; to determine the current attitudes of state policy makers towards and expectations for assessment; and to develop a basis from which to forecast the direction assessment policy will take in the future.

Sources of Data

The primary sources of data for this investigation were interviews with principals and review of documents. Documents reviewed included official papers of state agencies, bills and resolutions of the General Assembly, reports, letters, memos and minutes written by and for those involved in the development and implementation of policy, published research and analysis of assessment policy pertaining to Virginia, and any other written materials that could be obtained that might provide details of the processes and events that led to the rise of student assessment to the state's public agenda, its subsequent codification in Senate Bill 534 (1989), and implications of the policy. Primary documents consulted for this study appear in Appendix 1.

Interviewees were selected on the basis of their experience with and access to information relevant to the questions under study. The purpose of the interviews was to

gather information in order to reconstruct the events surrounding the origins of assessment policy and to understand attitudes and behaviors of public officials as they related to higher education (Manheim & Rich, 1986). A list of individuals interviewed or questioned appears as Appendix 2.

A survey approach to the research was studied, but determined insufficient to provide adequately detailed information regarding the motives, expectations, and interests of the people who make and implement higher education policy. A survey could not have provided the kinds of data that facilitate understanding of the origins of this policy, its current status, and its potential to influence higher education. The best way to find out what key actors in the state policy process thought and think was to review reports and memos they have written and to ask them to discuss their activities, plans, and understandings of the purposes and intentions of assessment policy in Virginia. This approach allowed for a more detailed contextual analysis deemed better suited to investigation of complex interactions than other methodologies (Helmstadter, 1970).

Description of the Research

The study began with a general review of the literature on assessment of student learning. With that review as a basis, documents specific to the genesis of assessment policy in Virginia, including Senate Joint Resolution 125 (1985), Senate Document 14 (1986), and Senate Joint Resolu-

tion 83 (1986), were identified and reviewed.

Individuals in academe and state government recognized as familiar with state higher education policy and its development were identified informally and contacted to obtain general answers to a series of preliminary questions pertaining to the motivations and history of the Virginia assessment mandate. All initial contacts were asked to name those they considered important sources of information who could provide a more thorough understanding of the subject. These additional subjects were asked to name those they felt to be knowledgeable and valuable sources of information. Through this "snowballing" process 65 subjects were identified, representing the perspectives of institutions, executive and independent offices of the state government, legislators, and regional educational organizations.

In addition, the results of a recent survey of legislators, other officials in state government, lobbyists, and representatives of the news media were consulted. This survey had been used to generate an overall ranking of members of the legislature in terms of their influence on the shaping of state policy (Edds, 1989a). These rankings were then compared to a list of chairs and senior members of key committees relating to higher education -- finance, appropriations, and education -- and through consultation with authorities on the structure and functions of the Virginia General Assembly (McGlennon, 1988), a list of legislators to

be interviewed was developed.

Legislators on this list were then contacted by mail to request an appointment for an interview session with the researcher. A copy of the letter sent appears as Appendix 3. The letters were followed up with telephone calls to make final arrangements of time and place for a meeting. Others identified for interview were similarly contacted by letters followed by telephone call requests to schedule interview appointments. This letter appears as Appendix 4.

In most cases, subjects were quite willing to cooperate with the researcher. Only six of the 65 subjects contacted for interviews were either unavailable or declined to be interviewed. Although none offered a specific reason for their reluctance to be interviewed, those who declined seemed generally to do so because they felt the issue was not one they were reasonably familiar with or because they simply did not wish to discuss it.

Interviews were guided by a series of questions formulated to address subjects' responsibilities and experience. These interview guides were developed for four groups:

- 1) those within higher education agencies, including the State Council of Higher Education for Virginia (SCHEV), the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB), and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS);
- 2) Virginia institutions of higher education;

- 3) the Legislative branch of Virginia government, including legislators and legislative staff; and
- 4) the Executive branch, including the Office of the Secretary of Education and the Department of Planning and Budget.

Sets of questions that guided interview sessions are included as Appendices 5 through 8.

The interview guides were generally followed, but not strictly adhered to, resulting in semi-structured interviews. The purpose of the interviews was to facilitate free flowing exchange, permitting and encouraging subjects to discuss in detail their thoughts on the issues raised, and to avoid artificial constriction of the range of their responses (Majchrzak, 1984; Manheim & Rich, 1986; Measor, 1985; Spradley, 1979).

Subjects varied in the degree of openness and comfort they demonstrated in discussing the issues raised. In this regard, the methods for recording interview data were of some importance. Interview data were recorded in each case by taking careful hand written notes. In twenty-six of the interviews, with permission of the subject, these notes were supplemented by tape recording the session.

Reliability and Validity

Reliability

In qualitative research, reliability is most importantly concerned with the degree to which findings are "independent

of accidental circumstances of the research" (Kirk & Miller, 1986, p. 20). To enhance reliability, the researcher has sought to carefully document all details of the procedures followed and decisions internal to the research. In providing a detailed description of the steps by which this study was developed, how subjects were identified and interviewed, and what documents were reviewed, the researcher has sought to provide information about the relationship between the approach to the research and the object of the research. This was intended to provide a more substantial basis upon which the reader may judge the quality of the relationship between procedures and intentions (Kirk & Miller, 1986).

In conducting qualitative research that depends on subjects' verbal accounts, even friendly rapport and a sense of trust between researcher and subject may not be enough to get information beyond an established and uniform "party line." The researcher sought in each interview to elicit frank and open responses from subjects, while maintaining a critical awareness of the issues and of each subject's comments and possible motives (McCluskey, 1987; Measor, 1985).

Validity

Efforts in the twentieth century to make qualitative research more rigorous and systematic have tended to focus far more on validity considerations than on reliability. Validity in qualitative research is taken to be a function of the accuracy of the interpretation of collected data

(Kirk & Miller, 1986). While the emphasis on validity in qualitative research is a necessity in making sense of the information gathered, there are no generally agreed upon methods of determining the validity of qualitative research (Babbie, 1986; Miles and Huberman, 1984).

A difficulty in qualitative research is that it potentially admits multiple plausible approaches and interpretations to the resultant data. Understanding phenomena in the realm of the social sciences is based on the construction of coherent and intelligible explanations and interpretations of social action (Campbell, 1978; Carr, 1983). While explanations may reasonably vary within the community of observers and interpreters, that should not be taken to suggest that all interpretations are equally valid (Allison, 1971; Phillips, 1987). Explanation in either the natural or social sciences is successful to the degree that it can address and answer progressively more complex questions raised by systematic investigation (Laudan, 1977).

The emphasis in this study has been on the demonstration of a chain of evidence and reasoning that explains the development of assessment policy in Virginia, its current status, and future potential to affect institutions of higher education. This approach has emphasized the analysis of causal relationships and the rejection of rival explanations, thus placing primary concern on issues of internal validity.

Less attention has been directed to matters of external validity. Generalizability is limited by the variance among states politically, economically, and in terms of higher education traditions and practices (Bottum, 1988; Musick, 1989; Newman, 1987; Pettit, 1987). The focus of the study was on the processes by which assessment policy has been developed and adopted by the state of Virginia. Review of the roles of various institutions, agencies and individual actors in the evolution of this policy provided detailed understanding in comparison to the broader and less specific information a multi-state comparative study would have engendered. However, some of the factors that have been identified as crucial in the development of Virginia's assessment policy may have applicability to the conditions and expectations surrounding higher education in other states. The position of Virginia in relation to other states is explored in the final chapter.

Interviews with subjects across organizations and ranks provided opportunities for cross validation or triangulation of interview data. By obtaining multiple instances of key information or ideas from different sources, findings were reinforced through an inductive process of analysis. The statements of subjects in this study were compared to the information provided by other subjects, information available through documents or other written materials, and responses obtained by other researchers, e.g., Ewell & Boyer

(1988; in press - a&b). This comparison of sources is a procedure suggested by many qualitative methodologists as a means of reviewing validity (Guba & Lincoln, 1981; Miles & Huberman, 1984; Patton, 1980).

One of the limitations of research that relies heavily on the perceptions and recollections of individuals as a major data source is that the mutability of memory and individual perspectives as well as the potential of researcher bias pose threats to validity. Ways in which these potential sources of bias were addressed included careful note taking and audio recording of interviews, triangulation of data through document analysis and 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. As an additional validity check, the study was reviewed, with particular attention to the accuracy of the findings and conclusions as interpretations of the data, by two outside readers very familiar with assessment in Virginia.

Methods of Data Analysis

The limited structure of the interviews produced data that were valuable, but difficult to summarize and condense. To an important extent the analysis of such data requires "immersion" in the collected information that permits a mental process of abduction - the part intuitive and part logical process by which the human mind is able to make leaps

from isolated facts to sensible patterns (Peirce, 1972; Saran, 1985). Through this admittedly subjective process, explanations of the phenomena observed that arise from, but are not superimposed upon, the information gathered and the events that have taken place can be developed and reviewed (Kratwohl, 1985; Saran, 1985).

To address the first research question, 'How did Virginia's assessment policy develop? What explanation of the origins of this policy is most plausible in light of the available evidence?' the plausibility and verifiability of each of five rival explanations of the origins and motivations behind student assessment in Virginia were investigated from the basis of the interview and documentary evidence.

Interviews and review of the written record also provided the basis from which research question 2, 'What are the attitudes of key elected and appointed officials in Virginia government toward institutional reporting of assessment data to the state? What is expected from assessment and how are these data to be used?' and research question 3, 'What are the implications of the expectations and intended uses of assessment data of decision-makers for the future development of higher education policy in Virginia?' were addressed.

The initial analysis of the data involved two basic steps:

- (1) construction of a coherent narrative to help ground the inquiry in the historical and current activities of state government, with primary focus on the State Council of Higher Education; and
- (2) ordering of the data according to the research questions, a process that was largely a matter of temporal division, since research questions 1 through 3 ask, respectively, about past events, current thinking and activities, and anticipated developments.

After this primary organization of the data, a number of strategies were employed to interpret the information at hand. The data provided evidence of themes that emerged across interviews. Through clustering, or looking for concepts and ideas that logically were connected, categories of responses were developed. By aggregating and comparing patterns in this manner a better understanding of the phenomena and dynamics under investigation was sought.

In succeeding chapters, each of the research questions is addressed. Chapter Four presents the findings of the investigation on the development of assessment policy in Virginia. Chapter Five presents the findings on expectations of policy makers for assessment policy. Chapter Six is focussed on the implications of assessment policy for Virginia higher education and the potential influence of the Virginia plan on other states. Chapter Seven places Virginia in regional and national contexts, summarizes conclusions of

the study, and outlines suggestions for future research.

Chapter Four

The Development of Assessment Policy in Virginia

The first research question concerns how Virginia's assessment policy developed. A thorough response to this question must address fundamental questions of who the key figures were in this process of policy development, what the background to this policy was, why it emerged as a priority in Virginia, and the motivations of those who supported it. The first half of this chapter details the development of assessment as state policy in Virginia. The second half of the chapter addresses the five rival explanations postulated as part of the first research question that asked what explanation of assessment policy was best supported by the weight of the evidence.

A Chronology of Assessment in Virginia

SCHEV's commitment to "institutional excellence" has been described for many years. Since the 1960s SCHEV has provided repeated emphasis on institutional quality that would stem from the mission and role of each institution under the oversight and authority of the Boards of Visitors (SCHEV, 1967a, 1972a, 1979a, 1981). SCHEV's assessment plans articulated since 1986 have been generally consistent with the institution-oriented approaches to quality suggested in earlier years (SCHEV, 1987c).

These statements often noted the desirability of measur-

ing quality in instruction and student learning in ways that went beyond the prevailing calculations of resource inputs per FTE (SCHEV, 1972a; 1974a). By the early 1980s financial accountability, which had been a preeminent goal in the 1960s and early 1970s, was seen as an area that could be further improved only marginally and at greater expense than it was worth (SCHEV, 1981). Since inputs had been measured and accounted for to the satisfaction of SCHEV, the development of better output measures was a reasonable succeeding step in the sequence of oversight for higher education. In addition, a number of national studies and organizations had called upon higher education to pay more attention to student learning and outcomes. In the southeast, the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) has wielded significant influence and in the 1980s has been emphatic in its calls for reform in higher education and support for assessment activities (Finley, 1989; Musick, 1989; SREB, 1985, 1988).

SCHEV's mandate to identify and discontinue unproductive academic programs also stimulated efforts to find more meaningful ways to look at productivity than simply counting numbers of program graduates. An attempt to move in such a direction was initiated in 1980 by requiring that proposals from institutions for new academic programs include a description of measures and criteria that would be used in evaluating the success of the program. To SCHEV's dismay, many of the proposals incorporated evaluations centered

around numbers of program graduates over time. The difficulty of the process desired and the lack of experience of most people in higher education in conducting studies of student outcomes ultimately led SCHEV to give up on the evaluation program and think about other approaches.

Beginning in 1983, SCHEV began a series of statewide evaluations of academic programs in selected disciplines and areas. SCHEV Director Gordon Davies described the motivation for these studies as growing out of curiosity on the part of agency staff over the relative status and quality of these programs and the need to address the evaluation requirements of program budgeting. These studies looked at programs including computer science, foreign languages, developmental education, business, and career planning and placement. The reviews were conducted by SCHEV with the advice and participation of the institutions. Program evaluations were anticipated to become supplementary to SCHEV's ongoing program productivity reviews and to be a more systematic approach to evaluation than had been the case previously (Davies, 1987).

A key factor in the movement of SCHEV from these ad hoc program reviews to a general assessment policy was described by David Potter, former Assistant Director for Academic Programs at SCHEV. In looking at program productivity, SCHEV staff members observed that "a number of programs that ... could be thought of as part of the core of a liberal arts college appeared to be very unproductive." SCHEV wanted to

motivate institutions to look more carefully at undergraduate education in the arts and sciences; the use of the program reviews was described by Potter as an initial means by which the agency sought to be "more active rather than reactive in helping to shape the curriculum; in helping to force institutions to pay some attention to what was going on in the curriculum."

At that time, SCHEV was searching for ways to translate long standing ideals of quality, accessibility, and accountability into specific action to affect institutional practice. Statements in the biennial editions of the Virginia Plan reflected growing attention that was paid to matters of institutional quality and outputs. The 1981 Virginia Plan tied the notion of accountability to the measurement of the quality of educational outcomes, declaring,

Educational accountability ... bears upon excellence as a goal of higher education in Virginia. The public knows what resources are made available to the colleges and universities, and it knows enough about how they are used. The public does not know enough about the results of higher education, however, and educators should spend the next several years designing ways in which their institutions might evaluate their programs, measure the results they achieve, and report to the people of Virginia (p. 7).

Measurement of the outcomes of higher education was also emphasized in the 1983 and 1985 editions of the Virginia Plan. By 1987 the push for assessment of student learning

had emerged as a full fledged state program. The Virginia Plan for that year asserted that the public wanted greater evidence from colleges and universities that important skills, abilities, and knowledge were being successfully imparted to students as an indication of the return on the public investment in higher education.

In 1984 SCHEV sponsored a statewide conference on revitalizing and reforming undergraduate curricula in the arts and sciences as another approach to getting institutions to think more deeply about what was happening in undergraduate education in general. Davies described this conference as a key point in SCHEV's efforts to stimulate institutional activity in the area of undergraduate curriculum review, significant because "it was the first systematic foray of this agency into the curriculum and its first vigorous statement about its priority being the undergraduate curriculum." In his view, what SCHEV sought to do was to begin "to set an agenda for higher education that was more than the usual banalities of planning: access, excellence, and accountability."

At the same time that SCHEV was planning and hosting its conference, the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) finally adopted formal criteria on institutional effectiveness. SACS officials had been working to develop such standards since 1981 and were the first of the regional accrediting associations to put specific emphasis on

accountability and assessment of student outcomes. This action drew further attention to expectations that Virginia colleges and universities formally address issues of institutional quality and effectiveness.

Current and former SCHEV staff members were virtually unanimous in their opinions that student assessment did not emerge as a direct outgrowth of the program review processes or the 1984 conference. Davies called assessment "a radical departure" from what was done before; others described previous efforts as "piecemeal." Through assessment a basis was sought that could provide for a far more comprehensive and meaningful look at a range of academic issues. Assessment was seen as a much more systematic and institution-wide approach to the issues of quality and improvement.

While accountability had been a long term commitment of SCHEV, and assessment would, to some degree, serve that purpose, the review and reform of undergraduate curriculum and the "improvement of teaching and learning" were important motivations for student assessment as it developed in Virginia (Davies, 1987a; SCHEV, 1987c; Student Assessment Committee, 1986). SCHEV hoped through its assessment initiatives to show that accountability and academic improvement were not necessarily incompatible goals (Davies, 1987b). In fact, Davies (1987b) described SCHEV's immediate priority as curricular reform, complaining of "confusion and complacency about what students should be learning." He noted the dif-

difficulty of meaningful assessment, but nonetheless asserted that "assessment of learning is an institutional obligation" (Ch. 2, p. 7).

In support of the desire to stimulate reform in undergraduate education, SCHEV provided funding for a project at James Madison University that would include the development of a pilot student assessment program as part of a broad review of undergraduate education at the university (Commonwealth of Virginia, 1985a). In the 1985 Virginia Plan SCHEV praised the James Madison University assessment pilot study as a project other institutions might profitably review and adapt to their own campuses (SCHEV, 1985a).

In continued support of the goal of stimulating undergraduate curriculum reform, for the 1986-88 biennium SCHEV devoted Funds for Excellence dollars to projects for curricular change in institutions (SCHEV, 1985a; Wright, 1984). The Funds for Excellence program has since been directed toward curricular change projects that have been developed in light of the mission statement and student assessment plan of the college or university (Ewell & McDade, 1988; Miller, 1989b).

By 1985, assessment was being formally raised as a topic of discussion within the General Professional Advisory Committee (GPAC), where it was first presented to most of the institutional presidents as a proposed statewide policy. The primary discussants in this forum were Gordon Davies and

President Ron Carrier of James Madison University. At the same time, assessment was raised as an issue of discussion within the Instructional Programs Advisory Committee (IPAC), a body composed of institutional chief academic officers.

In the 1985 Virginia Plan SCHEV reiterated its long held opposition to the use of standardized testing of all graduates as part of any state assessment process in Virginia (SCHEV, 1985a). But Gordon Davies learned that Senator Robert Russell was considering the introduction of legislation that might link assessment of student learning to institutional funding, somewhat along the lines of the model advocated by the SREB and used by Tennessee.

The original version of a study resolution (Senate Joint Resolution 125, 1985) called for the establishment of a joint Senate-House committee to study the quality of higher education in Virginia. But Davies encouraged legislators to support a different approach that he argued could be more meaningful and profitable for higher education in Virginia. Ultimately, an amended resolution was passed with formal support from several influential members of the Senate, including Elliot Schewel, Elmon Gray, and Education Committee chairman Stanley Walker, and the informal support of Senate Finance Committee chairman Hunter Andrews. In its final form Senate Joint Resolution 125 requested that SCHEV conduct a study to "investigate means by which student achievement may be measured to assure the citizens of Virgi-

nia the continuing high quality of higher education in the Commonwealth."

The report prepared by SCHEV's Potter, with the assistance of Virginia Commonwealth University faculty member James McMillan, in response to Senate Joint Resolution 125 was accepted in 1986 as Senate Document 14. In this study, SCHEV maintained their contention that statewide testing was not an attractive option for Virginia, instead suggesting that institutions be allowed to develop their own means of assessing student achievement. Legislators accepted this approach, and in Senate Joint Resolution 83 (1986) requested that all public institutions of higher education in Virginia "establish programs to measure student achievement." SCHEV was called upon,

in cooperation with the state-supported colleges and universities, [to] 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.

The document was noteworthy in its break with national trends toward standardized testing programs as a basis of state mandated assessment efforts (Ewell & McDade, 1988). The document served notice of a counter trend toward less prescriptive approaches to student assessment by state governments (Ewell & Boyer, in press - a).

Members of GPAC and IPAC were initially pleased with the

assessment plan proposed because it did not incorporate uniform, system-wide processes. However, this relief did not inspire institutional activity on the subject, as later events would demonstrate. One SCHEV staff member recalled that it seemed that "IPAC received [the assessment mandate] as an information item that had little or nothing to do with them."

In 1986, many institutional officials entertained speculations that assessment might pass by without requiring major efforts on the parts of the colleges and universities. Neither Senate Document 14 nor Senate Joint Resolution 83 stated any specific action that the institutions should take, and most waited to see what the next step would be (DeVoursney, 1989; Ewell & McDade, 1988; Slevin, 1989). It was widely believed that James Madison University, having already received substantial funding as the state's pilot institution for assessment, had accumulated most of the political capital available from such projects (Ewell & Boyer, in press - b).

In the latter half of 1986, when SCHEV staff had intended to be preparing the guidelines called for in Senate Joint Resolution 83, Potter and two academic coordinators left the staff. As a result, communication on assessment between the Council and the institutions was disrupted until late in the year when Margaret (Peg) Miller was named as Potter's successor. This gap in communication apparently

left many institutions unprepared for the mid-1987 deadline for assessment plans that was announced in November, 1986.

Although Potter had initiated an advisory committee process, it fell to Miller to carry through with the work of writing guidelines for institutional assessment planning. Frank Luth of James Madison University was initially asked by Potter to chair the committee, although he later admitted that at the outset, "we didn't have anyone who knew a lot about assessment." The committee membership included representatives from SCHEV, the University of Virginia, the College of William and Mary, Virginia Military Institute, James Madison University, George Mason University, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia State University, Longwood College, Old Dominion University, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Northern Virginia Community College, and New River Community College.

On November 24, 1986, Miller convened the committee to work with SCHEV staff to develop official guidelines for institutional assessment programs consistent with Senate Document 14 and Senate Joint Resolution 83. The committee met subsequently on December 17, January 23, 1987, and February 16, 1987. Drafts of the developing guidelines were circulated to IPAC throughout the process.

On March 24, 1987 draft guidelines for institutional assessment plans were forwarded to GPAC and were finally approved by the members of the State Council of Higher Edu-

cation April 1, 1987. In a memo to GPAC members dated April 3, 1987 Davies noted that members of the Council "emphasized in their discussion of the guidelines that the chief end of assessment should be the improvement of teaching and learning, and I hope you will keep that in the foreground as your institutions set about this important task." Although the final guidelines were not issued until April, SCHEV staff believed that Senate Joint Resolution 125 in 1985 and related activities since had given institutions ample notice and lead time to begin preparation of a response to the assessment mandate.

The urgency of submitting the plans was perhaps not felt by many institutions until the May 1987 dissemination of the Governor's budget guidance memo linking institutional eligibility for a number of incentive funding programs to SCHEV approval of an assessment plan by the June 30 deadline. This action gave SCHEV a large measure of new strength to wield in its push to get institutions to undertake assessment seriously (Davies, 1989; Ewell, 1988b; Gross, 1989; Potter, 1989). It also served to make the initial institutional response to assessment much more a matter of compliance than it had been previously. This reinforced suspicions held by some that SCHEV's commitment to assessment as an institutional program aimed at academic improvement was more style than substance; others saw the same measure as an appropriate means of stimulating action on an issue of

importance and value to the state and to the institutions themselves.

In July 1987 institutional assessment plans were reviewed by SCHEV staff and three consultants from outside the state. The consultants found that SCHEV staff did not have clearly defined criteria for judging the plans. SCHEV's initial approach to review of the plans was to use the April guidelines as an outline against which the plans could be compared. However, the plans varied so greatly in format and content that this proved unworkable. The consultants were relied upon to help generate evaluative standards more specific than the guidelines. According to one of the consultants, most of the plans initially submitted were little more than descriptions of a planning process that would take place later on (Ewell & McDade, 1988). As a result of the review, some plans were judged to be adequate as written, and some were conditionally accepted. A few plans were required to be rewritten, but only one, that of the College of William and Mary, was rejected outright (Ewell & Boyer, 1988; Ewell & McDade, 1988; Slevin, 1989).

Plans returned for clarification or rewriting were to be resubmitted by September 30, 1987. This placed a severe constraint on the amount of time that could be taken by institutions to revise their plans and for SCHEV to review them again. SCHEV pressed institutions to have approved plans developed and budgeted for by the end of the summer

because they believed that if assessment was not linked to the budget cycle for the 1988-90 biennium, little or no institutional action would be taken over the next two years until the next budget cycle (Ewell & Boyer, 1988; Ewell & McDade, 1988). Institutional assessment proposals were ultimately funded through direct budget allocations that averaged approximately \$12/FTE student statewide, although institutional allocations for the first year varied widely from one institution to another.

A general perception among institutional representatives was that in 1988 SCHEV began to adopt a more prescriptive attitude toward the institutions and assessment than had been the case previously (Ewell & Boyer, in press - b; O'Neil, 1989). Early in the year, SCHEV proposed a matrix format for display of institutional assessment plans and activities in the Virginia Plan. Institutions responded very negatively, and concerns were heightened that SCHEV was attempting to incrementally make the process more comparative and standardized. SCHEV dropped the use of the matrix in the face of this opposition.

In mid-1988 individuals involved in the development and implementation of assessment policy in Virginia indicated divergent reactions to assessment. While some individuals within institutions held that SCHEV had become more prescriptive over time in regard to assessment, others were satisfied that SCHEV had consistently followed the institu-

tion-centered approach outlined in Senate Document 14 and Senate Joint Resolution 83 and had done no more than work to build incentives into the process and improve channels of communication. There was also disagreement among those who had served as members of the state task force on assessment that had drawn up the guidelines over whether there were significant changes in the translation from Senate Document 14 to the guidelines. Some institutional officials expressed concerns that the oversight of the assessment process would increasingly become the responsibility of less senior SCHEV staff who did not share the institution-centered, non-prescriptive, improvement-oriented vision articulated by Gordon Davies, but would drift toward a greater emphasis on institutional compliance and accountability reporting (Chickering, 1988; Ewell & Boyer, in press - b).

Institutional progress reports on assessment activities were submitted to SCHEV in June, 1988. To SCHEV staff charged with reviewing them, the reports indicated wide variation in the quality of assessment programs underway. A significant number of institutions were perceived to be going through the motions of assessment, complying minimally with the requirements of the mandate. Institutions where plans had been put together in short order over the previous summer had found little enthusiasm or support among their faculty (Ewell & McDade, 1988).

In January, 1989 Senate Bill 534 (1989), which called for the addition of assessment to SCHEV's responsibilities under the Code of Virginia, was introduced by Senator Benjamin Lambert. The bill was prepared and proposed mainly at the recommendation of Secretary of Education Donald Finley, who decided in December, 1988 to have it introduced in the legislative session that would begin in January. Governor Gerald Baliles and Finley had reviewed the accomplishments of their administration and determined ways to perpetuate each initiative. Finley observed that assessment had no natural constituency to carry it through, so he and the governor decided to seek a statutory basis for it, and thereby to "institutionalize" it or insure its continuation beyond the end of the governor's term in office.

Supporters of the bill argued that as a statutory responsibility, assessment would be certain to receive adequate funding as part of the base budgets of institutions, and would not languish as an "add on" to receive funding each year as an extra budget item. This budgetary argument was pressed by SCHEV as a rationale for the bill. Institutions had, in fact, expressed concerns about the costs of undertaking assessment and the willingness of the state to continue to fund reform and assessment activities (Ewell & Boyer, in press - b), although Virginia has been more generous than most states in providing additional resources for assessment efforts both on campus and in sponsoring state

conferences to address assessment issues (Ewell & Boyer, in press - a).

Although institutional presidents provided at least tacit support of the bill, reactions at lower levels of institutional hierarchies suggested continuing suspicion that SCHEV would use assessment as an instrument to gain greater power and influence. A more detailed discussion of communication issues highlighted in the instance of Senate Bill 534 is presented in a succeeding section of this chapter. However, with the support of the Secretary of Education, the Governor, SCHEV, and no serious opposition from the institutional presidents or within the legislature, Senate Bill 534 passed without public dissent.

Soon after the passage of the bill, University of Virginia President Robert O'Neil wrote a letter to Davies to document his understanding of Virginia's assessment plan. The letter, dated February 16, 1989, outlined O'Neil's understanding of the purposes of Senate Bill 534, and reflected the spirit of Senate Document 14 (1986). He noted that the intent of the bill was to "preserve and perpetuate" an initiative supported by the Governor and that codification of assessment could be helpful for proper funding of assessment activities. He stated his further understanding that institutions themselves were to write the reports on their own assessment plans for publication in the Virginia Plan, and that the development of guidelines for assessment

would draw heavily on the views of IPAC and GPAC. The expressed purpose of the letter was "to avoid any possible misunderstanding in future years." This letter was later circulated by Davies to the members of GPAC, in an effort to further define the understanding between the institutions and SCHEV in regard to assessment.

In July 1989 reports on the first full year of assessment programs were submitted to SCHEV by the institutions. The content of the reports and their interpretation by state officials will provide important indicators of the continuing evolution of Virginia's experiment with student assessment.

Communication and Senate Bill 534

The introduction and passage of Senate Bill 534 in 1989 by the General Assembly underscored continuing communication discontinuity and mistrust that appear to exist between SCHEV and the institutions. Both Miller and Davies said that they thought that communication between their agency and the colleges and universities had been sufficient to keep the bill in question from emerging as a surprise to anyone. Davies suggested that institutions were taken by surprise on Senate Bill 534 because the whole bill was a "last minute" proposal, but pointed out that in December he "touched base with three presidents: Bob O'Neil, Ron Carrier and Jeff Hockaday, Chancellor [of the Virginia Community College System], and they all said 'yeah, go ahead.'" Al-

though O'Neil suggested some changes in the language of the bill, he did not offer opposition to its intent. While Davies expressed sympathy with concerns that institutions did not receive much advance notice, he sensed "a residual or underlying distrust" which assumed the existence of subterfuge on the part of SCHEV, and called this "extraordinary" level of mistrust "very discouraging after twelve years [as director of SCHEV]."

Miller similarly expressed regret and surprise over the degree of suspicion of SCHEV and feelings that institutions had not been adequately notified of the impending bill. Both also expressed puzzlement as to why individuals did not contact them if they had questions about activities in Richmond. Davies said he wished that the reaction would have been to simply ask SCHEV staff if they had made "an enormous screw-up or ... just do something we didn't understand." Instead, he said, he feels that some institutions react, "here comes Hitler ... heading for Moscow. I think that is regrettable, I mean if I wanted to make a power grab on this system, I would have made it a long time ago."

Within the Executive branch, interpretations of Senate Bill 534 also dismissed the conspiracy theory suggested by some institutional observers. Finley sharply rejected the notion that Senate Bill 534 represented another step toward a more prescriptive form of state oversight of higher education, pointing out that none of the institutional presidents

testified against the bill or even suggested amendments to it as it was introduced. Similarly, Richard Seaman, head of the education section within the Department of Planning and Budget, interpreted Senate Bill 534 as adding nothing to the assessment mandate that had not existed before. In his view, it was no more than a message to institutions that they were expected to maintain student assessment as part of their base budgets as an ongoing project that will provide some results to SCHEV annually, and found it significant to the extent that it made clear that assessment was not a fad, nor was it going to disappear with a new governor or assembly.

In spite of the benign views of assessment held in Richmond, suspicions of SCHEV abounded at the institutional level, and even within some portions of the state bureaucracy. An example of such suspicions about the activities of the State Council was the belief that in the case of Senate Bill 534 SCHEV followed a pattern of withholding information in order to better control institutional responses to it. Former SCHEV staff and some individuals within the legislative branch held that SCHEV routinely engages in such practices, and some institutional officials were unambiguous in their contentions that SCHEV intentionally failed to tell their representatives in Richmond for the legislative session about Senate Bill 534. Some also held that the Friday, January 20 date of Davies' memo to GPAC members explaining

the bill was calculated to reduce organized negative response, since the bill was introduced on the following Monday, January 23.

As one former state education official described it,

the whole legislative process depends a great deal on minimizing information flow in order to minimize conflicts that you might have to deal with One of the reasons those lobbyists [legislative liaisons from colleges and universities] are [in Richmond] is to keep their ears as close as possible to know what is going to happen so they can alert each other and you can be there on time, because otherwise you would never even know what is going to happen. It is a major effort not to bother informing people and SCHEV knows that game very well.

The Nature and Role of SCHEV in Higher Education Policy

In describing the path SCHEV has followed in the 1980s, Davies said, "with growing clarity, we are raising questions that are uncomfortable questions, and we intend to keep raising them. That means that for a number of people it is better if we go away. That's too bad. But that's our job." Assessment is an important way in which SCHEV has sought to raise probing questions system wide and within institutions.

SCHEV has pressed institutions on assessment through persuasion and exhortation, but particularly through control of initiative funding. The connection of eligibility for initiative funds to completion of acceptable assessment plans was certainly a key factor in motivating many institu-

tions to undertake serious efforts to plan an assessment program. One senior institutional official said that when SCHEV got the authority to approve assessment plans and control incentive funding they had obtained "both the carrot and the stick."

Assessment was described by senior SCHEV officials as providing an opportunity for them to work with institutions to obtain funding for program improvement projects on campus. SCHEV Associate Director J. Michael Mullen explained that from the perspective of the Council, assessment is a "perpetuation of the carrot [and] stick philosophy of changed behavior." He noted that "the two buzzwords with our Council for the last two years have been leverage and incentives." Leverage refers to the practice of making Council support for one project or activity contingent on institutions acting on others the Council wants to promote and may involve getting institutions to commit resources and the state matching them. Incentives refer to providing funds for which institutions can make proposals. A former SCHEV staff member agreed that assessment will permit SCHEV to continue to "use the carrot-and-stick approach. If they like what they read [and] ... see ..., some carrots will be forthcoming. If they do not like what they read and see, they will use the sticks."

Like all areas of public policy, higher education is subject to the pressures and changing fortunes of partisan

politics. Two former university presidents interviewed praised SCHEV for retaining its professional status and independence from any particular branch of government or political party. Of partisan politics and SCHEV's role in state government, Davies said that it was necessary for him to be "sort of oblivious" to political decision making. He added that if he aligned himself with one party or faction over another, he "would be dead as soon as administrations changed."

SCHEV's effectiveness is seen by staff members to hinge to an important degree on the trust and confidence of the Legislature and the Governor's Office. Yet within the executive branch, the Department of Planning and Budget has expanded its staff for higher education ten fold in the last twenty years. The most recent expansion, according to a Department of Planning and Budget analyst, was to enhance the independent analytical capabilities of the executive branch, because SCHEV was "viewed ... as being more of an advocate for the universities." However, he also noted that this view is not shared by most institutions, who "look at them as the enemy." Similar concerns about SCHEV's role as advocate for higher education versus objective advisory body were expressed by legislative staff.

The ambiguity of SCHEV's position in state government was summarized by a former SCHEV staff member who said that SCHEV is

caught in a nexus of pressures that it can never resolve. It is serving so many masters. The institutions want SCHEV to be an advocate for higher education. But the Legislature wants SCHEV to find solutions for it. To get it off the hook. To provide the kind of information it needs to make a rationale for whatever it wants to do. The Governor wants the Council to just fall in line into whatever [he] proposes. And then the staff of the Council has to figure a way to satisfy all these, realizing that it is never going to satisfy any of them.

The Role of Gordon Davies

The development of assessment policy in Virginia cannot be understood without recognition of the influence of SCHEV Director Gordon Davies. Although the influence of Ron Carrier of James Madison University in providing impetus to the assessment movement in Virginia is widely recognized, as is the writing of Senate Document 14 by David Potter, Davies is acknowledged at all levels and within all branches of government as the essential figure in initiating and shaping Virginia's approach to assessment.

In his 1987 report to the State Council, Davies articulated the view that while change is necessary in higher education, institutional inertia tends to make colleges and universities resistant to it. He emphasized the need for SCHEV to provide vision for the future direction of higher education in Virginia. In this view, SCHEV is charged with setting the agenda for Virginia higher education and must

vigorously pursue its priorities (Davies, 1987b).

An active proponent of the refinement and use of the "carrot and stick" tools of budgetary incentives and leverage, Davies has asserted the need for central coordination, but has also tried to walk a fine line between state influence on institutional practice and institutional autonomy. In his opinion, detailed plans for institutional practice emanating from SCHEV would likely engender "deep divisions among constituencies" that the Council could ill afford (Davies, 1987b, Intro. p. 4). For example, while he has advocated increasing SCHEV's power to discontinue unproductive academic programs, he has also noted the limitations of a central agency in making useful decisions about local academic programs.

SCHEV has come to play a key role in monitoring and promoting the growth of higher education in Virginia. One of the reasons for SCHEV's success in recent years has been Davies' positive relations with the General Assembly. He has cultivated a close working relationship with the chairs of both the House Appropriations Committee, Delegate Dorothy McDiarmid, and Senate Finance Committee, Senator Hunter Andrews (Boyer, 1989).

Davies described the key to his interest in assessment as the "genuine issues out there about the curriculum that are of general social consequence." He saw the issue of control, or "ownership", of the curriculum as a matter of

great importance, and asserted that "the faculty does not own the curriculum; the institutions do not own the curriculum. The faculty has a major role in shaping and delivering the curriculum -- but the curriculum is of enormous social consequence", and should be considered a public resource, belonging to "the people." In his view, this issue was tied in with one of the overall questions of a group appointed by the governor in 1988 to identify and make recommendations regarding issues of future importance to Virginia higher education, the Commission on the University of the 21st Century; namely, what kind of skills, knowledge, and values will be important to future generations in coming decades? Davies described this as a question that demands broad consideration, not limited to the deliberations of faculty alone.

**The Role of the Executive Branch
in Making Higher Education Policy**

State governors are crucial figures in the development of higher education policy in most states, and have been so identified in a number of reports and studies (Carnegie Commission on Higher Education, 1971; Carnegie Council on Policy Studies in Higher Education, 1980; Carnegie Foundation for the Advancement of Teaching, 1976; Committee on Government and Higher Education, 1985; Gove, 1985, 1987; Millett, 1975). In Virginia, Governor Gerald Baliles has maintained an active interest in educational quality at all levels

since the beginning of his term. He has been active in the National Governor's Association, whose 1986 report on educational quality, Time for Results, urged states to establish assessment programs in higher education.

Assessment provides a case in point of the Governor's central role in the development of higher education policy (Blumenstyk, 1989; Cook, 1989; Dorsey, 1989; Finley, 1989; Leone, 1989; Slevin, 1989; Warren, 1989). While governors have been generally supportive of SCHEV over the years, since 1986 SCHEV has worked particularly well with the executive branch in shaping the public agenda for Virginia higher education (Davies, 1987b; Finley, 1989; Potter, 1989; Slevin, 1989).

When SCHEV first began its work on assessment John Cas-teen was Secretary of Education and Charles Robb was Governor. Recollections of that period were that the assessment initiative was not one that the executive branch initially embraced with great interest. Since that time, the close working relationship between Secretary Finley and Davies has made an important difference in the course of assessment. Assessment is an example of a joint initiative that evolved out of congruent interests within the Governor's Office, the Legislature, and SCHEV (Davies, 1987b, 1989; Finley, 1989; Potter, 1989; Slevin, 1989). One former SCHEV staff member described this as

a symbiosis that exists there in

terms of conversations between the Governor and his counterparts in other states; Gordon Davies with his counterparts in other states; the Governor and Gordon Davies together; and then the Governor and Don Finley and Gordon Davies together. [They] came together to share [a] common agenda.

Baliles gave the Council a boost in carrying its plans forward with his May 1987 memo tying assessment to a number of incentive funding programs. The Governor and Secretary of Education have provided strong and consistent backing for SCHEV's assessment efforts. A former SCHEV staff member said that Governor Baliles understands the "concept of assessment" and higher education; "he's a wonderful Governor for higher education ... he does his homework; he understands the issues and, of course, from the insider's viewpoint, he and Gordon Davies have worked extremely well together." A SCHEV official called Baliles "probably the most intellectual and academic governor we've had in recent memory", who appreciates the significance of assessment. He said that Baliles' original reaction to the proposed assessment policy was: "shouldn't the institutions be doing this anyway?"

Secretary of Education

Although Secretary of Education Finley was not directly involved in developing the assessment proposal that emerged in 1985, he and his staff supported funding for assessment activities and have sought steadily to increase this sup-

port. Finley said that while assessment was an area of interest to him and to the governor, it was no more than one among many initiatives they have sought to foster.

From Finley's perspective, assessment grew out of situations in which the state was gathering a great deal of information from institutions for the purposes of making "fiscal assessments primarily directed at formulating budgets [and] composing budget recommendations for the General Assembly", but very little that pertained to issues of academic quality. He said that such issues have been appropriately left primarily to the institutions, but that the time had come to employ "some checks and balances that are a part of this world."

Not only has Finley worked effectively with Davies, he is also generally positively viewed by the legislature. A senior legislative staff member described Finley as a "very practical, results-oriented type of person" who has been a good Secretary of Education "because he didn't come from the academic world -- he wasn't entrenched in a lot of the views that the legislators think are too idealistic."

The Nature of the Legislature

Funding has been a primary focus of legislative actions that have affected higher education in the 1980s (Blumenstyk, 1989; Boyer, 1989). Funds for Excellence, the Maintenance Reserve Fund, the Eminent Scholars Program, and the Higher Education Equipment Trust Fund are just some of the

programs that have received legislative support in this decade. In addition, college and university faculty salaries in Virginia have increased faster than any other state in the South and faster than most in the nation in the 1980s (Blumenstyk, 1989; Boyer, 1989; Commonwealth of Virginia, 1985; Cook, 1989; Ewell & McDade, 1988; Finley, 1989; Leone, 1989). While legislators recognize that higher education receives a large portion of the state budget, most find this an appropriate distribution of resources (Boyer, 1989; Covey, 1989; Gray, 1989). Legislators take great pride in Virginia's institutions of higher education, and want to support "their" colleges and universities. The institutions are seen as constituting a diverse and generally healthy system with a positive and growing national reputation. They are also highly valued for their contributions to economic development in Virginia (Boyer, 1989; Leone, 1989; O'Brien, 1989; Wilson, 1989).

Legislators, senior legislative staff, and SCHEV staff describe the relationship between SCHEV and the legislature in uniformly positive terms. SCHEV officials have repeatedly said that much of the opportunity to approach assessment in an institution-centered manner stemmed from the confidence of the General Assembly in higher education. In Davies' opinion, SCHEV and the institutions have been able to raise "far more searching and profound questions" about student achievement and institutional mission than

would be possible under a more rigidly prescribed and controlled system.

Although expressions of mutual respect and confidence from legislators and SCHEV staff characterized the attitudes of the decided majority of those interviewed, two exceptions were noted. First, less senior staff and those outside the finance and appropriations committees tended to be much more harsh in their appraisals of SCHEV and particularly of Gordon Davies. Some vigorously contended that assessment was a "power move" on the part of SCHEV, arguing that Davies cultivates the goodwill of the General Assembly and uses it to expand SCHEV's influence at the expense of the institutions of higher education. The deference of legislators to agency expertise was described as a condition that permits their manipulation by SCHEV staff. These opinions were shared by some of those interviewed within colleges and universities. A second item of concern, identical to that suggested by some interviewees within the executive branch, had to do with SCHEV's role in state government. As one staffer put it, sometimes legislators feel "that perhaps the State Council or some of the staff are too much advocates for the universities", and noted a "fine line" between advocacy and "taking clearly an objective view and making recommendations to the governor, or Don Finley" on that basis.

Interest in higher education has been generally high among members of the General Assembly. Most members either

have a college or university in their district or graduated from a Virginia institution (Bennett, 1989; Boyer, 1989). Additionally, Senator Benjamin Lambert, primary sponsor of assessment legislation, serves as a member of the Southern Regional Education Board's Commission for Educational Quality. Other members who have been influential in SREB affairs are Delegate McDiarmid and Senator Andrews (Musick, 1989).

Despite this high level of interest, the General Assembly has followed and continues to follow a general "hands off" philosophy in regard to the internal functions and administration of colleges and universities. The legislature has been responsive to the arguments of SCHEV and the institutions that one of the strengths of Virginia higher education lies in its diversity and the need to recognize institutional individuality. Although assessment has raised concerns at some levels about expansions of SCHEV's power, there is virtually no support expressed by legislators or senior officials in the executive branch for such a development.

Both committee chairs and senior legislative members suggested that the General Assembly has not felt the need in the past to seek greater information on the workings of institutions of higher education. The role of the State Council as an advisory body to both the executive and legislative branches has led to that agency's acceptance as "the

repository of information" on higher education. The legislature, in the words of one House staff member, has "relied on the State Council in large part to ... come to them with the end results of recommendations." The legislature is comfortable with this arrangement, and has never "felt the need to have the Council provide detailed information" on institutions of higher education. With regard to assessment, staff members indicated general awareness of the activity, and particularly of the James Madison University pilot project, but said that the involvement of the General Assembly in assessment has so far been minimal.

Former institutional presidents described a process for making higher education policy decisions in the General Assembly as one in which legislators may informally ask critical questions about issues they are concerned about, but are publicly supportive of higher education. Such discussion and "off the record" negotiations characterize the legislative process in Virginia, particularly as it pertains to higher education. Legislators explained that the assessment mandate was initially called for as a resolution rather than as a bill because of the Assembly's reluctance to dictate policy to Virginia's colleges and universities.

In reference to assessment as a policy enacted by their authority, legislators generally had little knowledge or awareness. Key figures in the House and Senate claimed that they knew little or nothing of substance about the assess-

ment mandate. Those who recalled the resolutions had only the most vague notions of the issues involved. One of the Senators initially involved in moving assessment onto the legislative agenda added that the \$4.5 million earmarked for assessment was such a very small fraction of the total budget that it would not amount to enough to raise a significant discussion among legislators. To some officials within institutions of higher education that was a source of some consternation, leading one to state curtly that he could "personally attest to the blank ignorance" of legislators about assessment.

While the passage of Senate Bill 534 was taken by some to indicate more than a general interest in the assessment process on the parts of legislators, a former SCHEV staff member described those who serve as patrons of legislation for SCHEV as often not conversant with the contents and implications of the measures proposed. Others familiar with the legislative process also suggested that if a particular legislator was involved in writing a bill he or she can discuss it in some detail. Otherwise, it is just one of a very large number of bills considered in a legislative session. In the words of one former education official, "these guys are introducing stuff all the time based on favors." A legislator who holds key committee memberships for education described the primary way in which the General Assembly operates as "somebody gets ticked off and calls their legis-

lator for help." This description was repeated in conversations with executive agency staff. Similarly, an institutional officer related that Senator Lambert "told our institution people to be very careful and be wary of [Senate Bill 534] and alerted them to it because he didn't know whether it was against them or not."

A SCHEV official explained that legislators

probably would have no idea that [assessment is] going on, because they hear it once and that's it ... So to them this whole activity is frankly not that big a thing. And most of them have the same reaction that many of the rest of us have, I mean why aren't they doing this anyway? Why isn't this just a natural part of academia? It seems so logical and seems to be the thing to do ... in many respects it's like motherhood and apple pie, it's just something that naturally people think you ought to be doing. And [legislators] don't understand the natural resistance of academic people to doing new things.

Legislative action to address deficiencies is often precipitated when agencies, including institutions of higher education, are perceived to have fallen below a limit of tolerable performance (Floden & Weiner, 1978; Green, 1980). Legislators tend to operate under a set of assumptions, time constraints, and a limited set of what are seen to be practical and affordable alternatives that lead them to leave things alone unless a blatant negative example or constituent outcry are brought to their attention. These assump-

tions, constraints, and alternatives provide rough and informal boundaries for a range of acceptable performance by public agencies. As one executive agency staff member suggested, Virginia's bureaucracy has important "unwritten" standards, the most important of which are "don't make waves and stay out of the papers."

One of the important characteristics of the Virginia system is the time given for policy initiatives to evolve. According to one senior institutional official, initiatives for new programs are introduced to the legislature and given time for legislators to "absorb it ... you have to throw it out there and start to work on it." The nature of this process was described by a legislative staff member: "given the way we operate in Virginia, you almost have to let something play out and give the people who are proposing it be done a chance." This process was described as often taking several years, "from the time you first start to talk about something and you let the problems work through and then you come back and you look at it a different way. Then you really get things implemented." In regard to assessment, the legislature seems quite comfortable in letting SCHEV and the institutions take care of assessment for the near future, with no indication that they are impatient to see results.

Summary

Assessment evolved in Virginia as a program through

which questions of the direction and effectiveness of the undergraduate curriculum could be raised and addressed. Institutions have been called upon to develop and implement plans for assessment that are essentially efforts to review academic activities in light of institutional mission and purposes. The policy developed has emphasized an institution centered approach that has received the firm, but not fervent, support of the governor and legislature, who approve of the activities underway, but do not place them at the top of the state's list of priorities.

Rival Explanations of Assessment in Virginia

From this overview of the events and conditions that explain the development of assessment policy in Virginia, five specific explanations postulated as part of the first research question were explored:

1) Assessment developed as a logical state response to a "national mood" that demanded assessment as part of a greater degree of accountability to state officials on the part of higher education.

2) Assessment developed as part of a plan by an entrepreneurial institutional president and the director of SCHEV for the state to call for institutional information in such a way that it could be used to enhance institutional status and competitive position for the institution in seeking state resources, enhance the president's intra-institutional power, and at the same time increase SCHEV's influence

within state government and the system of higher education.

3) Assessment was adopted to provide output measures that had been sought for years by state planners who have established a series of input measures for higher education over the past decade. Acceptable output measures permit the application of a general evaluation model, described in the Commonwealth Planning and Budgeting Manual, to questions regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions of higher education.

4) Assessment was adopted as a result of the desire of powerful operatives in the Legislature and in the state planning bureaucracy to obtain data with which to justify desired, but perhaps controversial, actions regarding the status of certain state institutions of higher education.

5) The adoption of assessment exemplified the "garbage can" process described by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) and Kingdon (1984). The interest in obtaining more accurate input/output data on higher education is long standing in state government. Input measures were established over time as part of the budgeting process. Output measures were desired, but were problematic to find and implement without outcry from the higher education community. When calls for student assessment emerged as a national trend it presented a "problem" to which some state planners and perhaps legislators had long had a "solution": evaluation of the effectiveness of academic programs in Virginia's postsecondary

institutions. With assessment in place, higher education could be made subject to the same general evaluation model applied to other state agencies.

Explanation 1: Assessment developed as a logical state response to a "national mood" that demanded assessment as part of a greater degree of accountability to state officials on the part of higher education.

This answer was by far most frequently suggested by those interviewed as at least partial explanation of why assessment arose as a policy issue in Virginia. Those who offered this explanation pointed out the growing wave of concern for educational quality in the United States in the 1980s: in the critical comments of former U.S. Secretary of Education William Bennett and in a series of studies, reports, and conferences undertaken by organizations including the National Endowment for the Humanities, National Institute of Education, National Governor's Association, American Association for Higher Education, American Association of Colleges, and the Southern Regional Education Board.

The issues of accountability and quality that influenced elementary and secondary education nationally in the 1970s and 1980s have been seen as precursors of the assessment movement in higher education. Nationally, the public as well as public officials were sensitized to general issues of quality in elementary and secondary education by A Nation at Risk and related reports and commentary. These concerns

were reflected in Virginia in the Governor's Commission on Quality in Education. The Commission's report, which included a large number of recommendations for change in Virginia's public schools, was published in 1986. One SCHEV official called such notions of accountability "superficial" as explanations of the development of assessment, but many individuals involved with higher education in Virginia agreed that the focus on quality in K-12 had carried over into higher education. However, none were inclined to suggest that the two represent analogous situations.

Legislators and officials in the executive branch seemed genuinely aware of the qualitative differences that exist between elementary and secondary and higher education. However, the comparison of what Virginia was doing at the elementary and secondary levels to what was being done in higher education in terms of assessing student learning did influence the thinking of some state officials. As Senate Finance Committee staff chief John Bennett described it, assessment emerged as part of a "logical but not seamless progression from the emphasis we put on assessment in elementary and secondary." He called it "natural that, given that amount of emphasis on testing [in K-12], some attention would have turned to higher education."

Secretary Finley was particularly sensitive to the differences in state expectations for the two systems. In his view, although Virginia was "one of the pre-eminent states

in testing and measurement in our public schools, nothing like that was going on in higher education." He felt that by the mid-1980s it was clear that higher education would be influenced by the attention focussed on measuring student learning and achievement at the elementary and secondary levels. He emphasized, however, that assessment was intended to be developed "within the history and traditions and context of Virginia higher education."

Davies emphasized the distinction between K-12 and higher education, indicating that while he is not convinced that the model used for K-12 is very good, if it is,

it's ... because our responsibility in K through 12 is to provide a uniform basic preparation for our children across the state ... On the other hand, in colleges and universities we have been working consciously and unconsciously for 200 years to make them all different. So how the hell can we expect the results to be the same?

In Virginia, connections between policy makers and expressions of public concerns about educational quality were apparent. Two of the members of the Governor's Commission on Excellence in Education were simultaneously sitting as members of the State Council of Higher Education. Another two were members of the General Assembly - Delegate McDiarmid, House Appropriations Chair and a member of the Education Committee, and Senator Stanley Walker, a senior member of Senate committees on education, finance, and

rules, and co-patron of Senate Joint Resolution 125 (1985). Furthermore, the association of Senator Andrews with the Education Commission of the States and, along with Senator Lambert and Delegate McDiarmid, with the Southern Regional Education Board, and of Governor Baliles with the National Governors Association suggest the awareness of top policy makers with calls for reform, including student assessment, issued by leading regional and national organizations.

Even more specifically, shortly after the 1984 publication of the NIE report Involvement in Learning, Senate leaders asked SCHEV to advise them as to how Virginia colleges and universities were addressing the issues raised by the report. Furthermore, the nearby states of Tennessee, Georgia, and Florida had previously established statewide measurement of student achievement. These factors, and the knowledge that Senator Russell was curious about the feasibility of a state assessment model based loosely on the Tennessee system, led Davies and the SCHEV staff to seek to develop a strategy by which assessment could be addressed in a way consistent with the values of Virginia's system of higher education.

Many of those interviewed credited Davies with recognizing the existing and potential political force of the assessment movement and taking steps to address the issue in Virginia proactively rather than reactively. It was widely held that SCHEV's role in initiating action on assessment

was a means of pre-empting a system imposed by the legislature. However, there was no evidence or belief that legislators were seriously contemplating the imposition of assessment procedures.

Interestingly, the concept of accountability, so often identified as a key issue in discussions of assessment in the national literature, did not emerge as a primary issue in most interviews conducted. While policy makers were interested in institutional "quality control" and information on how things were going within institutions, there were no expressions of concern over a perceived lack of accountability on the part of higher education in Virginia. Much greater emphasis on accountability concerns came from agencies outside the state. Mark Musick of the SREB stressed the need for uniform measures and accountability to state authorities, and the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools' (SACS) Henry Ashmore characterized assessment and his agency's criteria for institutional effectiveness as arising from concerns that institutions had to be more accountable to the concerns of state officials and parents.

The rise of assessment on the public policy agenda in Virginia was to an important degree the result of the national movement that publicized issues of reform and renewal in American higher education. Explanation One provides significant but incomplete insight into the origins of assessment in Virginia. National movements for reform in

elementary and secondary education and at the post-secondary level were influential in moving Virginia in this direction, but Virginia's response to the "push to assess" differed in important ways from those instituted in other states up to that time and varied significantly from the programs advocated by the SREB and implemented by other southern states.

Explanation 2: Assessment developed as part of a plan by an entrepreneurial institutional president and the director of SCHEV for the state to call for institutional information in such a way that it could be used to enhance institutional status and competitive position for the institution in seeking state resources, enhance the president's intra-institutional power, and at the same time increase SCHEV's influence within state government and the system of higher education.

Policy initiatives may often serve purposes other than those overtly expressed. The crux of the issues raised by Explanation Two is whether assessment in Virginia was motivated by issues of organizational power and prestige beyond the stated goals of institutional self-evaluation and improvement. In 1985 the only Virginia institution actively developing assessment plans was James Madison University. JMU President Ron Carrier's primary interest in seeing assessment activities planned and implemented on his campus was as a vehicle to obtain funding for a wide ranging review of the university's academic programs. Carrier was con-

cerned that faculty and academic programs at James Madison had not kept pace with the changing student body that the university had attracted over the previous several years and sought a way to facilitate investigation and reform of institutional programs and practice in light of those changes. In his view, if it could be demonstrated "through a good process" that the institution was not meeting its objectives, then the faculty could be persuaded that curricular change was needed. He reasoned that this was a way in which the university could adapt to the demands of "a more sophisticated student body."

In this way, the path followed by James Madison University paralleled that followed almost a decade earlier by Northeast Missouri State University. Northeast Missouri State, like James Madison, was a growing institution in a period of transition from a regional teacher's college to a comprehensive university. Assessment was adopted by the president of each institution as a vehicle to drive and direct institutional change, and as a means of providing a more substantive basis for requests for legislative support (McClain & Krueger, 1985).

For JMU, assessment was adopted as a mechanism that would allow the institution to refine its objectives and evaluate its success in achieving them, but at least as importantly, was a means to obtain funding from the General Assembly for faculty and curriculum development. As Carrier

described it, "assessment was in a way only an incidental kind of thing. I realized that you had to have some type of appeal to the policy makers - that we are going to give you a better program" Assessment, he said, provided a way to respond to questions about what the institution was going to do, and how it would spend the money it sought from the General Assembly in a thoughtful and beneficial way.

Carrier explained that early in the Robb administration, he had foreseen a situation in which faculty positions and funding would be based solely on enrollment increases. It became evident to him that enrollment at JMU was going to level off below the numbers forecast. Looking for ways to obtain additional funding for institutions "whose enrollments had stabilized," he noted the interest in increasing funding on the basis of quality initiatives, and decided to explore possibilities for funding increases based on institutional initiatives rather than enrollments. He described this as "the motivation of greed ... Back in the 1970s I was the one that pushed for enrollment [based funding]."

Although enrollment driven formulae had been the keystone of funding for higher education since the late 1960s, when enrollments levelled off in the early 1980s, funding for some institutions was limited by the formula guidelines that had served them so well under conditions of increasing enrollments (Robb, 1984). At the same time interest had continued to grow within SCHEV and in the executive branch in

new ways of using funding to shape higher education policy.

In 1985 Secretary of Education John Casteen issued a letter to the institutions in which he mentioned, among other items, a desire to fund initiatives in undergraduate education. Finley, as Casteen's successor, sought to follow through on this request for initiatives. James Madison University's plan to review their undergraduate program came, with encouragement and help from Gordon Davies, to include the pilot effort in assessment. As Potter described it, "the Carrier pilot [was] a good example of [the] move to initiative funding, and soon assessment got caught up in that whole strategy." In Finley's view, the expansion of assessment efforts to all campuses was a reasonable step in extending a program that was generally very positively received in Richmond.

To a president like Carrier, interested in promoting change and developing new programs at the institutional level, initiative funding presented opportunities to obtain funding for innovative projects. In his opinion, "what the State Council needs to do ... is to keep encouraging us with funds to improve the quality of our program." He decried efforts to develop common standards for allocation of resources, arguing that it "destroys the creativity and initiative on the campus to do things."

Also at issue is whether assessment was construed as an effort on the part of SCHEV to increase its power within

state government and the system of higher education. SCHEV has repeatedly emphasized the purpose of assessment in Virginia as program improvement. Davies has long indicated his interest in curricular reform at the undergraduate level, and the 1984 conference on the liberal arts and sciences was evidence of that.

Potter expressed concern over assessment's potential to become an instrument of power for the State Council, but also described SCHEV's interest in assessment as originally growing out of observations that many traditional liberal arts programs for undergraduates were suffering from seriously declining numbers of graduates. He said that most of the SCHEV staff believe in the value of the "traditional liberal arts and sciences" and were reluctant to get involved in "shutting down" such programs. They sought ways to "revitalize the arts and sciences ... to make something positive come out of it."

The only source of support for the contention that assessment has or will substantially enhance SCHEV's power came from a small minority of those interviewed, most within institutions and a very few in legislative staff roles. If SCHEV sought power through assessment, they had ample examples from other states with much more prescriptive models of assessment, the solid backing of the SREB, and a supportive governor and legislature to press for a program that would have concentrated greater control of the system in the

agency's hands. At every point of the process, SCHEV has made the case to state policy makers that institutions must be given the opportunity to make their own way with assessment. Characteristic of Virginia government, the policy championed by SCHEV will be given several years to prove itself. If it fails in the eyes of the then governor, secretary of education, and legislature, a new approach to the subject will emerge, or it will be abandoned, as program budgeting, the IEP reporting process, and the program evaluations of the early 1980s essentially have been.

In summary, it is clear that Carrier adopted assessment as a way to obtain funding to support evaluation and reform on his own campus. At the same time, the JMU pilot provided SCHEV an opportunity to move ahead with their assessment/reform agenda. Carrier's power to influence the curriculum was indeed enhanced, because he gained information to "show" faculty what was wrong and what needed "fixing".

Assessment may enhance institutional opportunities for obtaining funding of initiatives for institutional improvement, but the degree to which that will be the case remains to be seen. SCHEV has been particularly emphatic on this point, and the view has been generally accepted within the executive and legislative branches as well.

SCHEV's power was enhanced by assessment to the degree that this instance of the use of initiative funding promoted a direction they advocated. Yet, as has been shown, SCHEV

is subject to pressures within government and past criticisms that it has not taken an active enough role in guiding state policy for higher education. Assessment has not yet moved SCHEV in a direction to become significantly more powerful. There is no support for expansion of their powers, nor do those interviewed in the executive or legislative branches see assessment as having had any significant effect on SCHEV's status or relationship with them. Assessment is generally seen by senior officials in the executive and legislative branches as a relatively minor program that is only one of many ongoing concerns and programs. SCHEV is powerful in direct proportion to the degree of support they receive from the governor and legislature. Some strain of SCHEV - institution relationships has been evident, but not in a way that suggests a significant change from the adversarial positions that existed prior to assessment.

Thus Explanation Two has a number of important merits. It reveals the importance of the coinciding agendas of Ron Carrier and Gordon Davies. Under a rational model of organizational behavior (Allison, 1971), institutions adopt policies that are seen as leading toward desired goals or strategic opportunities. In this case JMU sought funding and a way to review and shape the curriculum for a changing student body. SCHEV also sought an opportunity to promote undergraduate curriculum review and reform. Assessment provided opportunities for both sets of goals to be "packaged"

as part of funding requests to the General Assembly. JMU and SCHEV could both use the results of the pilot to show that good things were happening that deserved broader application and support.

Explanation 3: Assessment was adopted to provide output measures that had been sought for years by state planners who have established a series of input measures for higher education over the past decade. Acceptable output measures permit the application of a general evaluation model, described in the Commonwealth Planning and Budgeting Manual, to questions regarding the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions of higher education.

When the General Assembly mandated program budgeting for the state in 1975, the Department of Planning and Budget spent over two years trying to convert everything so that it would be in place by the proposed 1978-80 biennium deadline (Cook, 1989). In spite of these efforts, program budgeting was never fully implemented. Finley, who has formerly served as a member of the SCHEV and House Appropriations Committee staffs, said that while there were a number of useful ideas that came out of the budgeting approaches recommended in the 1970s, the process ground to a halt when it came to establishing indicators of performance for higher education. Although the budget documentation was set up to do so, procedures for evaluating the effectiveness and efficiency of institutions were never implemented. He explained

that the "culture of higher education in Virginia" as well as the confidence and pride of Virginia's political leadership in the public colleges and universities undercut support for aggressive evaluation requirements for higher education. Although qualitative differences between institutions are recognized, the mitigating circumstances in differential outputs between institutions are accepted and the question has not been pursued further.

Very few institutional interviewees indicated that they thought that assessment was a throwback to the evaluation phase of program budgeting, and they offered a variety of related interpretations of the demise of program budgeting. It was thought that the Robb administration's freezing of positions and expenditures, coupled with economic recession in the early 1980s stifled the movement toward program budgeting. One chief budget officer at a major institution felt that the sheer weight of the bureaucracy it generated brought program budgeting to a halt in Virginia. Others saw the information requirements of the process as contributing to its failure. SCHEV staff responsible for data collection and analysis said that as they understood the program budgeting plan, they were to collect certain kinds of evaluation data from the institutions. However, one said, "the information which was provided as part of the costing measurements had such wide variability that the accuracy was never acceptable to base any kind of program budgeting on."

Another agreed, saying, "I think that one of the crucial elements with the program budgeting was to get some idea of costs and ... we weren't able to do that."

SCHEV sought to shape program budgeting plans so that higher education would be well prepared for full implementation of such a system. As one SCHEV official recalled, it was assumed that the state was going to actively pursue evaluation requirements, "so our goal was to get higher education out so that the system that was implemented would be higher education oriented rather than a production of license plates model." However, he added, the evaluation section of the budget manual for Virginia "has never been implemented."

The relationship between assessment and program budgeting, according to Finley, is that "program budgeting in theory would have pointed in this direction [assessment]," but was simply never implemented. He further explained that he did think that assessment is or has the potential to be a way to get at some of the program indicators that were not adequately addressed before as part of program budgeting efforts. However, he added, the debate over whether best to foster evaluation processes through decentralized, institution-specific methods, or centralized, directive methods remains unresolved.

A connection between assessment and program budgeting was initially suggested to help promote the assessment pro-

cess, according to Potter, but he did not think that program budgeting "had very much to do about what we were trying to accomplish." Davies also said that he "probably" raised the connection of assessment and program budgeting ideas as an issue, and added, "when the question of evaluation was raised in our program budgeting days, I said we are doing this and this will in fact constitute a major portion of the evaluation that is being undertaken." He thought that two things resulted: the evaluation question faded in importance because SCHEV's activities were seen as addressing it; and the state failed to implement program budgeting. "So people lost interest because it became perfectly clear that the program budgeting craze was over and we were back into incremental budgeting, which is what we had been doing before and we never really got out of it." Similarly, Mullen's opinion was that "assessment came along after it was pretty clear that evaluation was dead. It's been pretty clear that evaluation was not going to get any funding since about 1984."

Legislative appropriations and finance committee staff said that they knew of no real interest in the General Assembly to revive program budgeting with assessment as an evaluation component. Within institutions, officials also foresaw little likelihood of a return to program budgeting per se, but did anticipate increased expectations for evaluations of institutional programs. Only one legislator con-

tacted initially indicated real interest in using program budgeting "to see where and how money is used" by state agencies. However, when he was contacted again a few months later, his attitude had moderated significantly and his comments were much more in harmony with those of his colleagues and less oriented toward notions of strict accountability and state directed evaluation.

Any current interest in full implementation of a program budgeting process at the state level would seem to be primarily isolated in the Department of Planning and Budget, and even there it does not appear to be an idea that is going anywhere. Department of Planning and Budget analysts indicated that within their agency there is some degree of interest in applying program evaluation to higher education, but it is unlikely to be acted upon, since interest in pushing for program budgeting does not exist in the General Assembly. One said that he believed that implementation of any systematic approach to program budgeting now would take five to six years and would be "an enormous task."

Of program budgeting concepts, one Department of Planning and Budget analyst said, "we're not even paying lip service to them anymore." He added that "some of the program aspects of program budgeting have gone by the board and if possible we're doing more line item budgeting than we were doing five or ten years ago." Referring to measures of agency or institutional inputs and outputs and efficiency

and effectiveness, he said, "you don't hear these kinds of terms around here. Some of us might think along those kinds of lines, but I don't think anybody treats it seriously."

Another analyst said that he saw program evaluation and student assessment as "two different worlds." Beyond perceptions that there is little connection between assessment and program evaluation, there is skepticism within institutions that the state has been or is interested in measures of institutional inputs, outputs, efficiency, and effectiveness for purposes of applying such information to budgeting or central planning activities. Indeed, within the Department of Planning and Budget, analysts for higher education expressed doubts as to the usefulness and integrity of any kind of quantitative measures of the results of higher education.

Richard Seaman, head of the Department of Planning and Budget's education section, said that he did not see much relationship between program budgeting and assessment. He said that although program budgeting has probably always existed in higher education, he did not think that politicians ever have really wanted to get into "the details of how higher education spends its money to the extent that they might have wanted to get into the details of how [other agencies] spend [their] money." He added that general satisfaction among legislators with the existing formula funding approach for higher education made it unlikely that they

would be interested in a major revision of the process.

Seaman approved of Virginia's approach to assessment and added that he thought "assessment is much more of an attitude and a philosophy than it is a science that is intended to create a specific result." He said that assessment has not had any discernable effects on the way the Department of Planning and Budget conducts its budgeting operations for higher education and was doubtful that assessment information from institutions would ever become a significant part of the budgeting process for the state. As for the use of assessment data being employed by the Department of Planning and Budget to complete the fourth phase of a program budget approach for higher education, Seaman expressed serious doubts about the usefulness of budget and quantitative output data in an attempt to arrive at conclusions about the effectiveness or efficiency of academic programs. While some other analysts within Department of Planning and Budget said that measures of institutional effectiveness might be useful, none believed that there was any serious interest or effort to implement this process, with or without assessment.

In summary, efforts to develop a program budgeting system for Virginia, and the perception of assessment as an accountability process led some observers to see a connection between assessment and measures of institutional effectiveness and efficiency. Neither documents nor interview

data from SCHEV, Department of Planning and Budget, the Secretary of Education's Office, and the General Assembly indicate any such connection. The evaluation model articulated in the state's Planning and Budgeting Manual is, for the foreseeable future, not relevant to assessment in higher education in Virginia.

Explanation 4: Assessment was adopted as a result of the desire of powerful operatives in the Legislature and in the state planning bureaucracy to obtain data with which to justify desired, but perhaps controversial, actions regarding the status of certain state institutions of higher education.

The fundamental issue raised by this explanation is whether assessment was motivated by a desire to "close the loop" on institutions that were perceived to be doing a poor job of educating undergraduates. Certain institutions have been suspect in this regard due to ongoing concerns about financial and management problems, low enrollment, and questionable academic quality.

Some institutions have been targeted previously with efforts to improve academic and outreach programs (Commonwealth of Virginia, 1989a; Department of Planning & Budget, 1985). SCHEV, in the 1967 Virginia Plan, recommended reduction in the scope of Virginia State University's degree programs and projected almost no growth in enrollments over the coming ten year period. In the succeeding decade VSU was the

only Virginia institution of higher education to experience enrollment declines. While the Board of Visitors and the legislature have taken steps to improve both curriculum and management of the university, Davies at one point suggested that it "may be desirable to reduce enrollment systematically to a lesser number of qualified students, and then to rebuild the university upon a more solid foundation" (Davies, 1987, Ch. 1, p. 13).

An issue long raised by assessment and related activities is whether the process in the long run works to the advantage or disadvantage of such institutions. State mandated programs in other states have led to controversy over assessment procedures and requirements that have tended to block the progress of disproportionate numbers of minority students (Adelman, 1986; Ewell, 1987a, 1989c; Klitgaard, 1985; Musick, 1989). Although the remediation problems that many traditionally black institutions may face suggest a value-added approach, little push for such approaches to student assessment has been in evidence in the southern states (Musick, 1989).

The potential usefulness of a value-added approach to assessment for traditionally black institutions was also recognized by the architects of Senate Document 14 and Senate Joint Resolution 83 (1986). Senate Document 14 contained broad references to the uses of value added assessment, an approach to assessment it described as focussing

"on net gains in student achievement over time" (p. 7). Additionally, Senate Joint Resolution 83 (1986) contained language accommodating to value-added assessment, saying 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.

Although this approach was featured as an important way of looking at student learning and growth, when questioned about their interest in value-added assessment, one SCHEV staff member said bluntly, "we're not looking for value-added"; another referred to value-added assessment as a "fantasy world." A well informed source within the state higher education system explained that language in the initial resolution suggesting a value-added approach to assessment was included largely as a way to help the traditionally black institutions.

Indiscriminate comparisons of institutions on the basis of standardized measures of student achievement were widely believed to be inappropriate. A number of those interviewed stated quite frankly that they saw no way to compare the traditionally black with the traditionally white institu-

tions, so that perhaps some version of a value-added approach made sense, in that institutions then were compared only against the standard of the relative levels of knowledge and skill with which their students begin and end their college careers. A leader in the initiation of assessment in Virginia declared that the institution of standardized testing and uniform measures would "devastate" the traditionally black institutions.

A senior SCHEV staff member said that an important reason for SCHEV's opposition from the beginning to any kind of statewide test as part of an assessment package was due to the diversity of institutions in Virginia. He suggested that such a test would "insult the intelligence of some of the students at some of the institutions" while being too difficult for others to pass, "even though they were graduates, or were about to become graduates, of one of our [other] institutions." He said that members of the General Assembly accepted that argument, "put in the context of institutional autonomy", and added that he thought that a value-added approach "recognizes the diversity of institutions."

SCHEV staff strongly and uniformly denied that assessment was in any way or at any point motivated by the desire to place any particular institution under greater scrutiny. A senior SCHEV staff member explained that the intent of assessment is not to compare institutions on the basis of

any particular measure, but to provide institutions with opportunities to look at their own programs and then provide assistance in helping them improve. SCHEV did not want assessment to serve as "another screening thing."

Similarly, Finley asserted that, to his knowledge, no specific institutions were ever under greater scrutiny than any others as a part of the assessment process. In the same vein, others interviewed within the executive branch said that they had seen no evidence that any particular institutions were under greater scrutiny or treated differently than others by the General Assembly. One added, "If that's done, it's done very discreetly. I've never noticed it in any public setting."

Legislators have officially expressed little interest in looking at specific institutions, especially in terms of academic outcomes, although legislative staff did describe concern about the management of "certain schools." As one staffer described it, "there has been long standing work with some schools to improve management, but it wasn't focused on student outcomes so much ... just on general kinds of concerns related to management of institutions." Senator Lambert described assessment as a tool for institutional improvement, not a means by which an institution might be "degraded" or closed. Other legislators acknowledged concern with ongoing problems at VSU, but pointed out that their efforts have been to provide assistance to the

institutions to rectify problems and at no point has "punishment" or closing an institution been seriously considered as a course of action.

Legislators are interested in information on what students get out of their college experiences, but as one staffer said, there are "no real major feelings of concern that we simply had schools who were imparting nothing to their students and therefore, it was a fraud." Executive agency and legislative staff members reiterated their perception of the strong commitment of the large majority of legislators to institutional diversity and autonomy. Legislative staff indicated that while there was no doubt that at one time or another individual legislators have thought about closing one of the institutions, the political obstacles to such an action had precluded its serious consideration. As one staffer explained, "I don't know about the future, but ... that's the kind of tough, tough political decision that would be an awful long time coming."

Senior staff within both the legislative and executive branches had grave doubts that an institution would be closed as a result of assessment, and could foresee shutting down an institution under only the most dire circumstances; "an absolute catastrophe." Problems such as seriously declining enrollment, faculty desertion of the institution, and severe economic declines were described as conditions that would force state officials "to conclude that the

institution no longer had a constituency. That it was no longer fitting a need." Legislative and Department of Planning and Budget staff suggested that a number of austerity measures would be taken before an institution would be closed. To close an institution, said a member of the Senate Finance Committee who has been involved with efforts over the years to improve conditions at Virginia State, "would be an admission of defeat."

Within institutions, there was little support for the notion that assessment grew out of interest in scrutinizing specific institutions, and one senior institutional administrator suggested that in his experience SCHEV has historically shown less interest in investigating the weaknesses of the less prestigious institutions than in looking for chances to "knock down the pretensions" of the stronger institutions. Similarly, assessment has been described by SCHEV officials as a means of "stirring things up" and "complacency reduction", and a senator who has been active in higher education issues called some institutions "overly self-congratulatory," a condition he thought assessment might help relieve.

Although some institutions may have had continuing problems of various kinds and assessment could potentially produce data that might be interpreted negatively, there is no evidence to suggest that assessment will emerge as a means by which to justify reductions in budget or other state sup-

port for any institution. There is no inclination to regularize or utilize assessment data as part of the budget process or as a general evaluative process for institutions.

It seems unlikely that assessment will be used to justify the politically explosive decision to close an institution of higher education. Even with much more systematic, standardized, and centralized mechanisms for assessment of student learning across Virginia's institutions, the political fallout that would result from closing an institution because it was doing a poor job would be overwhelming. Each institution has entrenched political, economic, and social constituencies with strong interests in maintaining their particular college or university. For assessment to single out institutions for punishment or execution would be a remarkable reversal of state policy and political folkways. It would further be a crushing blow to SCHEV's credibility with the institutions, requiring a very different approach to policy making for higher education in Virginia than has been followed since 1974.

Explanation 5: Assessment was adopted in a process that exemplified the "garbage can" process described by Cohen, March, and Olsen (1972) and Kingdon (1984). The interest in obtaining more accurate input/output data on higher education is long standing in state government. Input measures were established over time as part of the budgeting process. Output measures were desired, but were problematic to find

and implement without outcry from the higher education community. When calls for student assessment emerged as a national trend it presented a "problem" to which some state planners and perhaps legislators had long had a "solution": evaluation of the effectiveness of academic programs in Virginia's postsecondary institutions. With assessment in place, higher education could be made subject to the same general evaluation model that is applied to other state agencies.

The "garbage can" model, applied by Cohen, et al. to universities, and by Kingdon to the federal government, describes organizations that function within the bounds of the model as "a collection of choices looking for problems, issues and feelings looking for decision situations in which they might be aired, solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer, and decision makers looking for work" (Cohen, et al., 1972, p. 2). The examination of assessment to this point has already illuminated incidences of "choices looking for problems" and "solutions looking for issues to which they might be the answer." For example, the issues raised in Explanation Two indicate that James Madison's Carrier saw thorough review of the undergraduate curriculum as a "solution" to which he sought a fundable "problem." Assessment provided such a problem, as legislators became willing to fund projects that addressed issues of quality that had been raised in other states and in national

and regional literature. Thus, assessment became a pivotal factor in obtaining the funds needed to cover the expenses of a review of institutional programs and promote change on his campus. Similarly, concern within SCHEV that undergraduate curricula around the state seemed moribund led to a "solution" that called for the revitalization of the liberal arts. A conference dedicated to that end had limited effects, but the emerging "problem" of assessment gave SCHEV a new way in which to focus attention on and reform undergraduate teaching and learning. The agendas of JMU and SCHEV dovetailed, and the "problem" of assessment served as a sturdy vehicle through which to advance their respective "solutions."

Similarly, the evaluation process associated with program budgeting was invoked to help gain approval of assessment as a solution, albeit to a different problem. While it seems fairly clear that assessment has never been seriously planned as a component of program budgeting for higher education, SCHEV started out with assessment by referring to the evaluation component of program budgeting. But as one former SCHEV official admitted, "I don't think that it had very much to do about what we were trying to accomplish."

The second issue raised by Explanation Five is the accuracy of the depiction of assessment as a means adopted to go full circle and obtain unambiguous output measures as part of the budgeting process. As has been discussed in the

evaluation of Explanations Three and Four, there seems to be no serious interest in or effort to tie assessment to the budget, and as it has been practiced to this point in Virginia, assessment offers no data that could be fairly evaluated as more than the most broad and general kind of output information. While the garbage can model is useful in describing the application and adaptation of a national assessment trend to local concerns and problems, assessment does not at all seem to have been adopted as an output measure useful in the budgeting process. However, the garbage can model does reveal the extent to which policy is made and justified on the basis of preexisting definitions and concerns that may have little to do with the original intent of the policy as it was developed.

Explanation Five further suggests that, given output measures, higher education can be subjected to a general evaluation model that is applied to other state agencies. Whatever the degree to which the model outlined in the Planning and Budget Manual is applied consistently to other state agencies, it seems clear that higher education has not been subject to it and is not likely to be at any foreseeable point in the future.

Those involved in the state budgeting process for higher education were in general agreement that the process and treatment of higher education in allocating state funds differ from those associated with other agencies of state gov-

ernment. In the opinion of James Cook of the Department of Planning and Budget, who has seen the development of over 20 years worth of education budgets, higher education has, over time, been treated better than other agencies in state government. Similarly, the budgeting process for higher education was described by Seaman as "probably highly unique" among agencies of Virginia government in the way budgeting decisions are made. He said that he thought other state agencies were required to "do a lot more documentation of what they are doing and why they are doing it and [the] benefits from what they do; what their goals and objectives were." He attributes this at least partly to the belief that "higher education has inherent value to it. Intrinsic value to it. Other agencies do not have that aura going for them so they get examined much more on the basis of their accomplishments."

Legislators characterize their funding of higher education as generally "fair," but generous. McDiarmid explained that she did believe that higher education was treated differently than other agencies in the budgeting process, but added that this is necessary. In her view, all agencies are treated differently because their functions and services vary significantly, but all address legitimate state needs and interests.

Like Cook and Seaman, legislative staff described higher education as not subject to the same "intensity of cross-

examination" as other agencies, and suggested that while the treatment of higher education is generally better than that afforded other agencies, it varies somewhat from year to year depending on legislative priorities. House Appropriations Committee staff member Rebecca Covey noted that the different treatment of higher education is necessary because of the formula funding process, in which "there are four or five key decisions made that drive the funding pretty much for everyone. Whereas in the other agencies of the government ... there are more individual decisions made and it's more specific for each agency." She said that higher education has received more opportunities for incentive funding than most other areas of government, and added that she thought that in some cases "higher education is given somewhat preferential treatment [in comparison to other state agencies]." Similarly, the Senate's Bennett described higher education as

a different kind of animal ... very much treated in a favored position in the budget process [Legislators] have a paternal interest in following what goes on in the schools as well as a genuine belief that higher education is a good thing. So higher education is a valued, very favored enterprise in the budget process.

The "garbage can" model provides a general framework with which to look at the ways in which public policy is made through borrowing, adapting, and redefining ideas and

conditions. However, the scenario suggested in Explanation Five, like those of Explanations Three and Four, includes the application of an evaluation model tied to the budgeting process. This explanation is unsupported by the research, and alternatives are suggested in the discussion of the garbage can model and its implications.

Explaining Assessment in Virginia

While each of the explanations postulated contributed to an overall understanding of the development of assessment policy in Virginia, none was complete in and of itself. The broader picture that emerged through the research suggests that assessment was pushed into the state's consciousness by the force of a national movement, a "mood" that called upon institutions to provide concrete evidence that they were accomplishing ends expected by society. This movement was picked up by SCHEV and shaped in ways that advanced academic issues on SCHEV's agenda. Some institutions also came to see potential benefits that assessment might bestow upon them --opportunities for additional funding, a lever to promote internal change, and better information to market the institution to prospective students.

Rather than output measures, the predominant motive for assessment among policy makers in the legislative and executive branches in Virginia government was the desire for more formal assurances of "the continuing high quality of higher education." A related interest in the legislature was for

institutions to provide some reassurance on issues that are of general concern. While legislators did not indicate interest in specific issues of accountability, they were interested in institutional efforts to support the generally held belief that higher education is a good investment and produces a good "product." Funding for higher education has increased rapidly in the 1980s, and many public officials, including members of the State Council of Higher Education, felt that some information about the benefits of that funding would be appropriate (Bennett, 1989; Mullen, 1989; Potter, 1989).

Assessment was also a potential aid in justifying state support for higher education or related policy decisions. According to Potter, Gordon Davies was frequently asked by legislators "what amount to ... implicitly comparative questions Like how well is this system doing compared to North Carolina's system? And he needed some more substantial way of answering that question." One university president offered a similar view of the process, suggesting that assessment is "partly a function of the role of state coordinating boards," providing them a better data base and a more effective way of demonstrating to legislators what they do. He described assessment as being "popular with legislators because it helps them justify some expenditure levels and tuition levels."

There are other secondary explanations of the motiva-

tions for assessment. For example, assessment was described as providing important "consumer information" to prospective students and their parents. Members of SCHEV and legislative staff agreed that the primary usefulness of assessment information would be more to the prospective consumer of higher education than to the General Assembly.

As Finley explained, assessment did not expand because people in Richmond thought that something was wrong, but rather that he, the Governor, and key legislators felt that something was right; that assessment was doing something very positive for James Madison University and was a constructive direction that could benefit all institutions of higher education in Virginia. There was broad agreement that assessment struck legislators as a positive activity for institutions to undertake, and that they recognized that institutions and the characteristics of their students vary greatly.

At this point, assessment is exclusively an academic program that is centered primarily in the institutions. There is virtually no connection now or foreseen between assessment and the base budgeting process for higher education, except as an informal add-on component. It seems highly unlikely that assessment will be used to justify changes in the base budget of any institutions. Such a development would have enormous negative political impacts that policy makers prefer to avoid. Neither do such activi-

ties fit the character of Virginia traditions of dealing with higher education.

Chapter Five

The Expectations of Policy Makers for Assessment

The second research question concerns the expectations of policy makers in regard to assessment. Plans for the use of assessment data and the attitudes of key elected and appointed officials in Virginia government toward institutional reporting of assessment data were investigated, and in this chapter, these attitudes, expectations, and plans are presented and discussed.

Providing Signals of the Commitment to Rationality

Evaluation and assessment are partly means by which institutions demonstrate their commitments to efficiency of performance and rational planning and decision making (Covaleski & Dirsmith, 1988; Floden & Weiner, 1978). Since the early 1970s SCHEV has described a need for institutions to demonstrate careful management and coordination (SCHEV, 1974a). Assessment, as it has evolved in Virginia, also provides institutions with opportunities to show evidence of their dedication to publicly approved ideals of teaching, learning, and scholarship as cornerstones of the public university.

Thus, activities undertaken by institutions under the banner of assessment help "provide a common language from which to reaffirm and solidify ties with outsiders through symbol management, consistent articulation of common vision,

and interpretation of diverse actions in terms of common themes" (Covaleski & Dirsmith, 1988, p. 3). Recognition of the important political symbolism associated with assessment in no way suggests that the activities involved are somehow frivolous or insubstantial (Floden & Weiner, 1978). The role of symbols in political exchanges and policy making is a powerful one (Edelman, 1971; Elder & Cobb, 1983).

The value of assessment programs as important means by which institutions can respond to external demands for accountability has been widely suggested in the national literature (Astin & Associates, 1987; Banta & Moffett, 1987; Ewell, 1987; Halpern, 1987; National Governor's Association, 1986). SCHEV has sought to play down this aspect of assessment, and discussions of 'accountability' *per se* occurred infrequently in interviews. But accountability is taken to refer to expectations that institutions are responsible to the public about what they are doing and how they are doing it. A fundamental component of assessment is the request or demand that institutions supply evidence that they are achieving the key elements of their respective missions and that they are reviewing the practices that are followed to do it.

The definition of accountability encompasses expectations associated with assessment. Although Virginia has emphasized assessment for improvement, it, like other states, seeks evidence and assurances that institutions are

committed to substantive processes of self evaluation and improvement. However, in Virginia these expectations are coupled with limited reporting requirements, making the assessment process a fundamentally symbolic form of accountability to state authorities.

The focus on assessment as a tool for improvement has not successfully communicated to institutions what will constitute acceptable evidence of institutional quality to SCHEV, the legislature, or the executive branch. Assessment, like any form of evaluation, is an inherently political process (Cronbach, et al, 1980), even in states where it has been girded with the trappings of science, as in Tennessee, where public funds are disbursed on the basis of standardized test scores. Such a system applies a veneer of objectivity to the political task of evaluating and rewarding narrowly defined standards of performance.

In Virginia, assessment has so far developed in a way that is amenable to the political nature of the process. Narrowly defined system-wide standards have been avoided and processes of negotiation have been evident in institutional efforts to develop and implement plans. Multiple conceptions of individual and organizational goals are evident in the bargaining among parties engaged in the development and evolution of policy. Thus, the "garbage can" model can provide a valuable perspective on the importance of multiple viewpoints and objectives in determining the ultimate shape

public policy takes. As Allison (1971), described this process, the essence of the political task is to convince others "that what needs to be done is what their own appraisal of their own responsibilities requires them to do in their own interests."

A politically sophisticated model for assessment must also recognize that issues of evidence of institutional quality are not based solely on "objective" reporting of facts. This is not to suggest that political decision making is simply irrational, but it is appropriately described as "arational." Political activity and responses "arise from a loosely structured process of interpreting fragmentary information and ambiguous cues in the light of prior expectations and changing, uncertain, or conflicting personal preferences" (Elder & Cobb, 1983, pp. 1-2). Thus, the interpretation of assessment data, like any other information, is colored by assumptions and what is believed to be true.

Interpretations are largely predicated on the source, medium, language, and context of the information received. As Davies (1988b) suggested in commenting on testimony before the General Assembly, "one good anecdote can beat pages of careful analysis." He added that while good analysis must be concrete, it should also be tempered by comparisons to personal and particular characteristics with which decision makers can identify. In policy making, the inter-

pretation of information is of great importance, since much political activity is an effort to control and manage these interpretations (Solomon, 1987; Stone, 1988).

The Importance of Communication in Shaping Expectations

Regardless of whether expectations for institutional assessment were consistent, the communication of expectations was a consistent source of difficulty. One dimension of this issue was seen in the contention, frequently articulated within SCHEV and even within the institutions, that those who initially opposed assessment did so primarily on the basis of misconceptions of what was expected and intended. For example, SCHEV staff claimed that the reason faculty in some institutions were reluctant to accept assessment was that "they did not initially understand what the activity was all about", and they "did not realize that the process could provide genuine benefits." Within institutions similar opinions were expressed; that opposition to assessment "grows out of ignorance of what is happening", that many people "don't know what assessment is or what it is for", or that a campus leader reversed a critical stance on assessment when a "false notion" of assessment was replaced with greater knowledge of the processes and potential benefits. These attitudes point to the pivotal role of communication between SCHEV and institutions in the development of assessment policy in Virginia.

Proponents of assessment have tended to see communica-

tions from the state as promoting a very positive program, while opponents interpret the same information as demonstrating the punitive attitude of the state toward their institution - evidence of what Ewell has called the "fondest hope/worst fear" phenomenon (Gross, 1989; Miller, 1989; Warren, 1989). This has been an important factor in SCHEV's difficulties in communicating their intentions and expectations for institutional assessment.

SCHEV staff referred to the "gap in personnel" that resulted when David Potter left and described a corresponding "gap in communication." Peg Miller said that during the last third of 1987 "nothing was coming out of the Council", and she saw this as a possible root of the communication problems that have plagued SCHEV through the assessment process, noting "I think probably we needed to constantly have this message reiterated during the development process. The development process was very badly short-changed." Other SCHEV staff members agreed, and suggested that more time to visit campuses and talk to faculty and administrators about what assessment was all about would have been very beneficial to the entire program.

The somewhat vague expectations of SCHEV in regard to assessment have caused some degree of concern within institutions. Vagueness in establishing standards has made it difficult for institutions to know how their plans and efforts would be judged and have made it difficult for SCHEV

to specify criteria by which they would approve and monitor institutional assessment efforts, and how data will be used (DeVoursney, 1989; Gross, 1989; Nock, 1988; Warren, 1989). At one institution whose initial assessment plan was severely criticized by SCHEV, the officer responsible for developing the plan explained that time was short and they "read [SCHEV's] signals wrong." Senior academic officials at some major Virginia universities expressed opinions that suggested their uncertainty of SCHEV's expectations regarding assessment.

As noted, SCHEV's commitment to curricular improvement has not been wholly trusted by the institutions. In spite of a consistent effort to emphasize local initiative and control of the process and products of assessment, the State Council has not been completely successful in communicating this message. Even the degree of unity that top state officials have shown in supporting assessment has been taken by some institutional officials as evidence of conspiracy.

SCHEV staff feel strongly that their message that assessment is for the purpose of improving education and not for purposes of accountability has been very clear and consistent. While it is acknowledged that the implicit accountability issues in assessment may interfere with "people being able to hear the improvement argument," there is a feeling within SCHEV that campuses across the state have gradually begun to accept their argument. As one staff

member who had recently visited a number of campuses explained, "once you get into this process you realize that the outcome is improvement" However, the same person cautioned,

what we have to hope is that the accountability people become convinced that it's going to lead to improvement, and a lot of it depends on the message we give. If I go out to these campuses [and say] you need to do this, this, this, and this, and I don't listen to what they are getting out of the process, it will continue to be an accountability issue for them.

Expectations for Assessment

In very broad philosophical terms, Gordon Davies expressed greatest interest in seeing assessment emerge within institutions as an "academic problem, as an intellectual problem; which to me is much more interesting [and] fruitful than getting interested in it as an administrative responsibility." Emphasizing the crucial role of faculty in addressing the epistemological questions he posed, he said that he thought that assessment as an administrative responsibility was characteristic of programs in other states, and one that he did not want Virginia to emulate.

Davies suggested that the thinking within SCHEV about assessment has evolved and achieved greater clarity of purpose over time. In his view, and those of his colleagues at SCHEV, a very sharp line has been drawn between assessment for accountability and assessment for curricular change. He

added, "I am honestly not sure that you have it both ways. Assessment for accountability carries with it a set of political issues that inhibit curricular change, I think."

In discussing the improvement - accountability dichotomy in discussions of assessment in Virginia, Peg Miller explained that although the focus is on improvement, there is still an implicit accountability component. She suggested that when institutions assume responsibility for self-evaluation, they "are demonstrating to the people who pay for them that they are keeping track." She added that while no one is looking for any particular results, "they are looking to see that institutions are in fact evaluating themselves."

Davies similarly described the general attitudes of state officials as wanting to know that institutions are

examining their assumptions and their results. They do not want to establish the criteria for accountability. They want to know that institutions are behaving responsibly ... I believe that the institution, in order to warrant this grant of responsibility, should be willing to assure the public that it maintains a thoughtful and questioning stance toward its own standards.

In supporting assessment, many Virginia policy makers have indicated no more than general or even casual interest in the process. However, reporting information may lead to dissatisfaction that previously did not exist and result in greater attention to the operations of institutions (Stone,

1988). It may also provoke interest in the process and stimulate a demand for further data. The potential impact of assessment on the perceptions of policy makers naturally provides strong motivations for institutions to present positive images of themselves (Bottum, 1988; Cook, 1971; Stone, 1988). Individuals within the institutions and their counterparts at the state level are very conscious of this. Some institutional officials expressed concerns about the amount of "negative" information that assessment activities might document that will be actually reported to SCHEV.

SCHEV's Expectations

It is clear that vague expectations have troubled the assessment process for SCHEV. Miller discussed an apparent irony in the assessment for improvement rhetoric, observing that,

on the one hand, we say institutions are responsible for curricula, but this process implies that all is not well. That there are changes that could be made. We don't know what they are but we would like institutions to find that out. That's bad news, I mean that makes people feel hurt.

The implication is that SCHEV believes something is wrong with Virginia's colleges and universities but either does not know or does not want to presume to know what it is. This has been a source of subtle friction between SCHEV and the institutions. Some members of IPAC expressed concern with what they perceived to be a "guilty until proven

innocent" attitude within SCHEV.

The comment that something unknown needs changing has led to continuing difficulties within institutions in understanding SCHEV's expectations for assessment planning and processes. What is perhaps unclear or confusing is whether Virginia's assessment policy is an expression of confidence, in that institutions have been asked to develop their own plans and be largely self-policing, or suggestive of a lack of trust, in that institutions are being compelled, under pain of losing access to incentive funding, to conduct sweeping reviews with vaguely articulated expectations that reform is needed and improvement will result. The implication is that needed reform and improvement would not occur without the intervention and prodding of the state.

Data Expectations

SCHEV staff members described previous efforts to gather complex information on costs and instructional activity. It was found that colleges and universities were not set up organizationally in ways that would allow easy collection of data from multiple offices and departments. One described student assessment as an analogous situation, saying that the various departments and offices within institutions that held data pertinent to student learning and achievement were not set up to integrate such information as part of a state reporting system. He added, "to jump into assessment we found very early on was going to be an horrendous problem,

just from the logistics side. Let alone from the other side in terms of outcomes and what do you measure and how do you measure it." While he did not think that it was because of the recognition of such difficulties that Virginia's assessment policy emphasized institution-specific, non-comparable approaches, the institution-specific policy "has even further pushed us away from any kind of centralized reporting in terms of outcomes."

SCHEV staff have consistently indicated that their assessment data requirements from institutions are minimal. They expect information that goes beyond anecdote or testimonial, but claim little interest in data in and of itself. SCHEV's collection of assessment reports was characterized as an example of a situation in which the central agency seeks to verify that appropriate internal processes of evaluation and review are in place and functioning.

In a February 1989 memo to IPAC, Miller (1989a) stated that if any institutions were uncomfortable with reporting test scores or similar kinds of data to SCHEV, they need not do so, but could simply verbally summarize the nature of the data. The statement was an attempt to further reduce institutional fears of comparisons on the basis of assessment data and to underscore SCHEV's commitment to academic program improvement over accountability. A SCHEV staff member closely involved with assessment characterized the memo as clear evidence that it is not SCHEV's interpretations of the

numbers, but those of the institutions that are important, saying, "I don't know how that is being perceived out in the field, but to me, that is an incredibly strong message that speaks to the improvement versus the accountability ... view on our side."

Also repeatedly emphasized are SCHEV's commitments to not compare institutions on the basis of assessment data. Davies stated that when the institutional reports are published in the Virginia Plan they will not be listed separately from the rest of the institutional information, but will be integrated with the institutional descriptions and mission statements. He added, "we will not attempt in any way to tabulate [or] regularize those assessments."

A former SCHEV official compared assessment reporting to previous SCHEV reports that have included comparative tables, noting that such actions resulted in serious conflict between the Council and institutions. In his estimation, the appearance of a table comparing institutions on some facet of assessment would be disastrous for SCHEV, because Davies and Miller have made so many promises and assurances that such would not be the case. He suggested that even SCHEV's allies in the institutions would find it difficult to support them in this event. While doubting that Davies would want comparative tables in any case, he nonetheless asserted that SCHEV will have to "walk pretty softly on how they present [these] data."

Miller predicted that with the July 1989 reports SCHEV "will not be getting anything like the data we would have sort of hoped for in the best of all possible worlds." However, she did express her conviction that all of the institutions are "at least on the road," and wondered if only looming deadlines inspire institutional action. Her comments suggested that SCHEV's expectations were limited at least partly because there was little certainty of what was sought beyond a general process and demonstration of an institutional commitment to that process.

She went on to describe "exactly" what SCHEV plans to do with the reports submitted by the institutions in July, 1989. She said that SCHEV was to receive a combination mission statement and assessment summary for publication in The Virginia Plan. Each institution's full assessment report was to be read by the coordinator who is the liaison for that institution, Miller, and a consultant from outside the state. These three readers were to then discuss the reports they read and the institutional programs described in each. Miller said that these discussions were to involve "just general reactions to [the reports]. That will be between us and the institutions. And basically it is a kind of consulting process as far as we're concerned; an advisory process."

SCHEV's capacity to deal with assessment places limitations on what they can realistically demand and process. A set of factors frequently alluded to in interview sessions

were the limitations of SCHEV's staff and resources to deal with the enormous amounts of data that assessment could potentially inundate them with. A former SCHEV staff member agreed that if SCHEV is flooded with data from the institutions, it will be very difficult for them to deal with the situation, because they don't have sufficient staff to handle it.

One institutional officer compared SCHEV to a regulatory commission trying to control a massive utility; while most utilities have "a host of economists and lawyers, the regulatory commission has three or four of each and that is about it. SCHEV is in the same boat." He added that any call by SCHEV for assessment data "across the board is a mistake if for no other reason that they cannot analyze it. They don't have the staff to." Another institutional vice president compared assessment to program budgeting and the IEP reporting process in Virginia, suggesting that one danger for assessment is that it will follow in the paths of those two previous programs by billowing into a top-heavy, bureaucratic mechanism that will ultimately fall of its own weight.

Potter argued that the political realities of SCHEV's position limit its ability to commit large amounts of its resources to sustain a single policy effort for an extended period. "There are just too many players, too many variables, I think, to really do that", he said. One SCHEV

staff member admitted that the agency could not conduct follow-ups to institutional assessment procedures, explaining, "We just don't have those kinds of resources. But if institutions do this on a regular basis and then report to us themselves, which they are now required to do, then we have a good general idea of what's happening."

A frequent SCHEV theme was that if the institutions do not develop effective assessment procedures now, people in Richmond will impose an undesirable system. SCHEV staff members suggested that one of their expectations was that the institutions must prove that the decentralized, campus-centered approach is superior to a centralized, standardized system. As one said, "if [institutions] can't decide what general education means on their campus, it leaves open the possibility that someone will tell them what it's going to mean ..., and that doesn't make much sense to us."

SCHEV staff also frequently expressed the sense that they had worked hard to provide an alternative to a centrally controlled system of testing and to provide funds for institutions to carry out the processes that they individually devised. Assessment as construed by SCHEV has been generally received very positively by those in government as an important self examination by institutions.

However, SCHEV must develop a meaningful report out of the data provided in 1989, because, in the words of one former staff member, "they are under tremendous pressure to

come up with something." As Davies noted, there is a primary accountability component involved in assessment, and that is between SCHEV and the legislature. SCHEV must be able to show that the program for which they have argued so persuasively has been worthwhile, and that the funds appropriated to support it have had some positive effect.

State Policy Makers' Expectations and Assessment Data

The origination of assessment efforts from within colleges and universities rather than their promulgation by the states has been praised from many quarters (Carlisle, 1988; Ewell, 1985c; Newman, 1987; Working Party, 1986). But much of the success of the decentralized and institution-specific nature of assessment in Virginia will ultimately rest on whether assessment results from diverse and noncomparable institutions can and will be communicated in ways that convince SCHEV, the General Assembly, and the Governor's Office that they are undertaking assessment in good faith, with an honest eye to self-reflection and improvement. If public officials are not reassured of the good intentions and effort of the institutions, an obvious dissonance between what is desired in higher education and what is reported may impel the legislature or the executive to press for more controlled means of evaluating institutional activity.

In the opinions of a number of senior state officials, the issue is still open as to whether assessment programs can be developed by colleges and universities in such a way

that both the needs of the individual institutions and those of policy makers at the state level will be satisfied. But Davies summarized what Finley and others have repeatedly asserted:

legislators want to know that the institutions are assessing student learning. They don't want to know what the results are, they don't particularly care. But they do care that people are assessing student learning. It's very different from public education.

Legislative Expectations Regarding Assessment

Senior state education officials have emphasized that legislators have not pressed for information about how or even whether specific information resulting from assessment activities would be provided to the General Assembly. In fact, legislators have shown little serious interest in assessment. As Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC) director Phil Leone stated, there is "no intensity" in the General Assembly behind assessment - it is not seen as an important issue. Similarly, Department of Planning and Budget analysts said that they had seen little evidence of real interest in the legislature in obtaining hard data from institutions on student achievement or institutional outputs. Department of Planning and Budget's Michael Etkin said that he was unaware of "any impetus" either from the executive branch or the General Assembly to look at general academic standards and output from institutions of

higher education. Legislative staff also found that legislators agree that assessment activities "sound like a good idea", but there are "no real major feelings of concern."

Staff members for the House and Senate committees responsible for budgeting agreed that there has been little, if any, discussion within the General Assembly of assessment or of the issues raised by assessment. Becky Covey of the House Appropriations staff suggested that "once we start getting some information back within the next two or three years, we can focus the attention back in and have those kinds of discussions." She and John Bennett of the Senate Finance Committee staff said that from the perspective of the legislature assessment is in a very early stage of development. Bennett added that there is little anticipation that the institutions will have any significant findings to report at this point.

Legislative staff had no concrete expectations for the nature of the data or how they will use it, although it was considered most likely that assessment information would emerge in the General Assembly not as a systematic review that would be tied into the budget process, but as a source of information that might help shed light on questions that arise from time to time. Bennett suggested that unless assessment provides "fairly precise" kinds of information, it will probably do little more than serve as "a continuation of the informal assessment or the informal comparisons

that we already have. So and so's doing a good job, or such and such is a good school."

Senator Benjamin Lambert said that he hoped that college and university administrators will let members of the General Assembly know if there are problems with the assessment mandate as it develops beyond Senate Bill 534. Lambert is one of the best informed of legislators on assessment in Virginia, but he seemed somewhat uncertain about its value. He believed it will be beneficial to institutions in the long run, but had concerns that there may be problems that have not been foreseen.

While legislators are not uninterested in higher education issues, their attitudes typically included the following: assessment was seen as a way to look at the effectiveness of state expenditures, there was great confidence in the Virginia system of higher education, the nature of SCHEV's coordinating role and the diversity of the institutions was approved of. Priorities for higher education were to see that institutions were appropriately funded and to avoid legislative influence in their affairs.

The legislature does not seem to have any specific expectations for assessment. One senator explained that only a "damning" report from SCHEV on the state of higher education in Virginia would touch off a serious debate in the legislature on this issue. He added that assessment is not a "front burner" issue because it is not a crisis situa-

tion; the legislature is currently satisfied to let SCHEV handle it, although they will expect a progress report from Gordon Davies. This perspective was confirmed by institutional officers familiar with the legislative process in Virginia, officials within state executive agencies, and senior legislative staff members. One senior legislative staff member described a sense of legislative attitudes and assessment reporting in the following terms:

if it were shockingly low that we were adding very little value, which I doubt very seriously that the findings would ever report, then [legislators] might stimulate some serious action. But the fact of the matter is I don't expect it to be that way because in the first place I would be very surprised if that were the true case and second of all I would be even more surprised if the institutions designed a process that would reveal that to us.

Expectations of the Executive Branch

The Department of Planning and Budget's Seaman said that he saw the primary use of assessment data as being at the institutional level. He thought that assessment information could help institutions support specific budget requests, as SCHEV has advocated, and could communicate institutional concern for students and teaching to state policy makers: "I think it will become kind of a ... political tool for higher education to demonstrate that it is concerned ... about students and that will help higher education in general."

Finley expressed much the same attitude in saying that he did not "envision [assessment] being used very much at the state level. There may come a time somebody else will -- but I don't." He emphasized that he sees assessment data as being collected for the use of those within institutions. Similar to other policy makers interviewed, he asserted, "what we are interested in is an assurance that they ... are doing [assessment] ... conscientiously and objectively. We are not really interested in superimposing our judgments on them."

Finley's expectations for assessment were very straightforward. He saw assessment as a process of ongoing self-review and effort to improve. In his view, it is "obvious" that the intent of assessment is improvement, to help build a process for ongoing review and renewal that will benefit students and faculty. He described assessment as a mechanism that will facilitate ongoing "assessment and reassessment of what you're doing. Without that mechanism, I suppose it's possible that things just keep going along as they are without any self-assessment."

According to Finley, state leaders have chosen not to tell institutions how to conduct their assessment efforts or what to do with the results. He described this as in keeping with Virginia's system and traditions, but suggested that Virginia's approach may not be the best approach in other states. In his opinion, the Virginia approach to

assessment is an attempt to engender a situation in which

the results 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; and that again will be much more productive than trying to drive something home ... out of Richmond.

Summary

State policy makers indicated vague expectations for assessment. The primary interest seemed to be in the symbolic value of the activity: they weren't particularly concerned with obtaining or using specific data, but wanted assurances that meaningful and appropriate processes are in place, although most have very vague or no concepts at this point of what would constitute such processes. What will constitute acceptable assurances is also quite vague. The whole process seems to be imbued with certain political habits in Virginia - a desire to avoid undue government influence in higher education and willingness to give advocates of a particular policy a number of years to work it out before alternative action might be considered. SCHEV officials have not specified the data they seek from institutional assessment processes and indicated limited plans for the uses of such data. Only a very negative report from SCHEV on institutional assessment efforts and results would provoke a more directive approach to assessment from legislative or executive officials.

Chapter Six

Implications of Assessment Policy in Virginia

The third research question concerns what the expectations for and intended uses of assessment data portend for future higher education policy directions in Virginia. Assessment was clearly intended as a mechanism to facilitate the evaluation and reform of undergraduate curriculum and to enhance institutional self evaluation practices generally. These processes were expected to provide assurances of quality to members of the General Assembly and other state officials. Assessment also has helped advance the use of initiative funding programs. At the same time it has created opportunities for expanded reporting mechanisms from institutions to the state and exacerbated tensions between SCHEV and the institutions. A number of potential consequences arise from assessment as policy and practice. In this chapter, some important questions raised and directions indicated by assessment are examined.

Attitudes Toward Higher Education in Virginia

Any developments in Virginia arising from assessment will occur within a framework of existing policy, attitudes, and customary practices followed by state decision makers. Through the course of this research, certain attitudes emerged as repeated themes in the comments of state officials about higher education in Virginia. These attitudes

include a desire to avoid legislative influence in the internal affairs of institutions of higher education, pride in the quality and diversity of the state system of higher education, and a willingness to give policy proposals a period of years to come to fruition.

Legislative staff suggested that legislators sometimes are skeptical about what occasionally seems to them the self-serving nature of the jealousy with which institutions guard the principles of diversity, autonomy, and uniqueness. Still, the attitudes expressed by legislators themselves indicate solid support for institutional diversity. Virginia higher education is seen as one of the best systems in the nation and diversity is accepted as an important factor contributing to that quality. This logic is key to legislative acceptance of the institution-centered assessment policy.

The House's Dorothy McDiarmid said she and her colleagues want to see "diversity", or meaningful differences in the missions and nature of the institutions, not less variance among the public colleges and universities. While she is interested in being able to compare universities to appropriate others on a national scale, she wants to resist "homogenization" that she thinks would occur under a more centralized system: "we are very fortunate to have a very lively higher education presence in Virginia that is interested in being above the mean." She added that she "obviously" would like to have Virginia colleges and univer-

sities measured for national comparisons with peer institutions and would like to move away from regional comparisons. She said that she thought that Senate Bill 534 expressed a general sense that "we want our schools assessed nationally."

Institutional Comparisons

The interest in "national assessment" expressed by McDiarmid reflects that of a number of policy makers in gaining a sense of how Virginia institutions compare to their peers in other states. While national comparison has not been an issue of substance, the issue of within state institutional comparison has been a topic of serious concern in the negotiations on assessment between SCHEV and the colleges and universities. Concerns regarding inappropriate comparisons of institutions have been long standing in Virginia higher education. Sensitivity at the state level to avoiding such comparisons has been indicated virtually since the inception of SCHEV, if not before (SCHEV, 1961; 1971b; 1978).

In the case of assessment, from SCHEV's perspective, David Potter said that from the beginning, "there was, in effect, a negotiated kind of guarantee, at least in my mind, between [SCHEV] staff and the institutions that we would make that a very individualized statement" so that comparisons would be neither necessary nor feasible. He added that Gordon Davies was also very concerned that assessment should

be essentially non-comparable between institutions. Guideline 10 of the 1987 assessment guidelines stated explicitly that "the purpose of assessment is not to compare institutions." As the process has unfolded, institutional worries over comparisons influenced SCHEV to discard plans for tabular descriptions of institutional assessment activities in forthcoming editions of the Virginia Plan and to reduce the reporting expectations for standardized test scores (Miller, 1989a).

Executive branch officials saw no real foundation for comparison concerns, and some SCHEV staffers were impatient with the continuing controversy over comparison. They argued that there was simply not comparable assessment being done on Virginia campuses, even if someone from the press or another agency sought such a thing. One suggested that even if comparison occurred, it would "not lead to any loss of life." Another explained the perspective that "what institutions are really concerned about are unfavorable comparisons, and that's why you have to have a plan that is institution specific, because you can't compare institutions as diverse as the Virginia public institutions."

Concerning the controversy over comparison, Senate Finance Committee staff chief John Bennett summarized attitudes expressed by a number of members of House and Senate committees concerned with the budget, saying,

these institutional people are very

naive.... [T]o say that they're very sensitive to the issue of comparison, I can understand, but we make those kind of comparisons all the time on an informal basis.... So the question becomes then, how do you develop a fair process for [looking at institutions]. But to say that people don't make comparisons is extremely naive.

Concerns over inappropriate comparison of institutions are not supported by the expressed interests and intentions of state policy makers. SCHEV staff have made repeated promises not to make comparisons on the basis of assessment data, and backed down when challenged by the institutions over placing institutional assessment information in a matrix format. There is no interest in tying assessment to the budgetary process in any formal way that would permit comparisons. Legislators are well aware of the differences that exist between institutions and see assessment information as potentially useful in making the kinds of informal comparisons that are seen as long-standing and routine. Finally, the guidelines for institutional assessment activities and reporting are broad enough that institutional activities vary to a degree that inhibits very specific comparisons.

Concerns of State Officials for Higher Education

The results of a recent national survey of institutions of higher education conducted by the American Council on Education showed assessment ranked tenth out of thirteen

"challenges facing institutions in the next five years" in the minds of senior administrators (Chronicle, 1989b, p. 24). Similarly, assessment is not the guiding issue in discussions of the condition of higher education in Virginia among many, if not most, state officials.

The legislature does not appear to have any serious worries about assessment or student outcomes for higher education. Concerns in this regard would seem to be directed much more toward outcomes of high schools. House Appropriations Committee staff member Becky Covey said that she was aware of "only very general, sporadic kind of interest" in information about student outcomes, but did say that there was far more specific concern within the legislature in regard to adequate preparation of students upon entering college. Others agreed that legislators are sensitive to information about student preparation for college.

The clearly preeminent higher education concerns for the future pertained to enrollments, particularly out of state enrollments and the anticipated growth of in state enrollments, and tuition levels, again concerned with out of state students and keeping tuition affordable for in state students. This is strongly indicative of the priority given assessment in the minds of many state policy makers: they are interested in institutional activities of this type and are willing to fund them because they regard them as positive. Little, however, beyond this level of activity is

foreseeable from the legislature, barring a surprisingly negative report from SCHEV, the Joint Legislative Audit and Review Commission (JLARC), or some other agency that has the ear of the General Assembly.

In fact, the upcoming review of SCHEV by JLARC was thought by some subjects to be relevant to assessment. JLARC director Phil Leone said that his agency's review of SCHEV will probably consist of a general review of the Council's duties and functions. Assessment is a recent enough policy development that it will probably not figure prominently in their study. Although student assessment was raised as an issue for study late last year, Secretary of Education Donald Finley persuaded legislators to delay a central review until it was better established.

Legislative staff suggested that JLARC's look at higher education is potentially of importance to future developments with assessment or higher education in general. As one House staffer said, "the legislature uses them in a lot of ways to generate ideas, and movements can sometimes start from what comes out of their work" because they are able to address a greater level of detail than regular legislative committee staff.

Assessment and Resource Allocation

While no link between assessment and the budget was seen or anticipated, and state officials have repeatedly asserted that assessment is to serve purposes of institutional self-

review and program improvement, in the early 1980s SCHEV noted that higher education faced "increased insistence that the results of higher education be measured and used in decisions about funding" (SCHEV, 1983a, p. 4). In his 1987 report to the State Council of Higher Education, Davies wrote that institutions should be rewarded based on the quality of their assessment efforts and subsequent actions to improve their curriculum. With due respect to current assertions to the contrary, past suggestions to tie assessment results to resource allocation stimulated further investigation of this issue as a possible consequence of the assessment process.

When asked in 1989 about such a connection between assessment and resource allocation, Davies said that his thinking in this regard has changed over time. He explained that he had at one time thought that the flow of resources into and through an institution, with resultant outputs "was essentially a linear process" that required adjustment "so that the results informed the resource allocation. We tie the knot between the front and the back." He went on to point out that his experience with higher education in Virginia has led him to change his thinking; "that while there should be an evaluation of what comes out the door of that institution, it's very dangerous to tie further resource allocation to the results." Davies said that he did not see a way to effectively connect assessment to the budgetary

process "short of revolution." Rhetorically, he asked what the state will do if it is decided that students are not learning enough at a particular institution. Cut their funding? Penalize them in some way? For these reasons, he argued, the budgetary "knot" cannot be tied.

Overall, there was little support for directly connecting the results of assessment, whether positive or negative, to the budget in any way. The overwhelming majority of those interviewed expressed serious doubt that assessment will ever be or was ever intended to be tied formally to the state's budgeting processes for higher education. There is interest in providing support for efforts to improve the quality of institutions, but even those very few who conceded that assessment could potentially alter the formula funding guidelines were adamant in their opinions that Virginia will never follow the route of Tennessee in explicitly linking performance on mandated measures to institutional funding. In fact, the Tennessee model for incentive funding was harshly criticized by several of those interviewed.

Those who believed that assessment would find its way directly into the budget process included the House's McDiarmid. She said that the Appropriations Committee routinely looks at the state's investment and what is produced by state agencies of all kinds. However, while she suggested that assessment information will be used to help make budget decisions, she emphasized that the committee's review

is an informal process, and added that all of the budgeting process in the General Assembly is informal. Others agreed with McDiarmid's characterization of the application of assessment to the budget. There is interest in "funding quality", but it will enter the process informally and through incentive and initiative funding.

Most legislators indicated no desire to use assessment as a major factor in making resource allocation decisions. Senator Benjamin Lambert also said that, while he felt that it was acceptable to give "assessment some teeth" [i.e.-connect it to initiative funds] to push institutions, he had never had any thought of connecting assessment to funding eligibility or budget decisions. Other legislators who sit on the House Appropriations or Senate Finance committees felt that information on program quality within institutions could be useful in the budgeting process, but they saw it more as an item of general interest - an item on the fringe that would fit in as part of the informal methods used to make funding decisions.

Legislative staff were quick to point out that if assessment data suggested that an institution was not educating students adequately in some way, the response of the legislature would hardly be to cut off state support for the institution. In the event that a particular institution was found to be doing a very poor job of educating students, Bennett suggested that legislators would find it "shocking"

and

there would be some expectation that someone would do something about it, either the Secretary of Education or State Council or somebody in concert.... I don't think that particular school would be punished in the budget process, it would be more like people would wring their hands and decry the situation and that nobody was doing anything about it, but I think there is an accepted premise that each school fills a niche and so it would be very, very unlikely for there be any punitive action taken simply because they weren't doing it.

Bennett further argued that assessment could not be applied to the budget process now because institutions that find themselves having problems will be quick to request additional resources for improvement. He added that institutions can also make the case that any kind of comparisons based on assessment data are invalid or not sensitive to the unique circumstances of the institutions. "We're a ways away from any kind of a valid comparison [that would allow appropriate application of these data to the budget]", he said.

Bennett's comment relates to a point repeatedly emphasized by SCHEV staff. "Smart" institutions will use assessment to help justify funding requests from the General Assembly. Davies explained, "I see [assessment] as a marvelous opportunity because an institution is being asked to say, this is what we think ought be the results of under-

graduate education. This is what we find are the results of undergraduate education. We are wide of the mark in the following areas. We need some help." Richard Seaman of the Department of Planning and Budget also suggested that assessment could serve institutions effectively in this way.

One of the arguments frequently raised by those interviewed within each of the major branches and agencies of state government against the likelihood of applying assessment to the budgeting process was based on the reliance of the state on formula funding for higher education. From the perspective of one SCHEV official, individuals who are concerned about tying assessment to the budgets fail to understand that the "budgeting process is really ... pretty mechanical ... for the most part", being a "combination of enrollment, level of students, and the kinds of programs that the institutions has."

The impact of formula funding will be considerable if enrollments grow as predicted over the next several years. As Finley pointed out, the large funding increases in the 1980s for higher education in Virginia were driven partly by sympathetic governors and legislators but also to an important extent by the effect of increasing enrollments on formula funding. A Department of Planning and Budget analyst agreed, noting that the predominant approach to resource allocation is formula funding, and has little to do with outcome or performance evaluation. Of the use of formulae

for making funding decisions, he said,

they're objective, they're empirical and formula computerizable.... You can plug in some numbers, get some outcomes, [and] compare to where they should be according to the model. It makes funding decisions very easy for the General Assembly, and they like it.

Although there is significant interest in enhancing the use of initiative funding and using the budget to recognize and reward quality, this is not a preeminent concern on the order of enrollment and tuition issues. The large increase in enrollments forecast for Virginia suggests that while the state experiences significant enrollment growth, funding will increase and attention will continue to be captured to an important degree by questions of system capacity.

While almost all states use some formula based technique to allocate funds to institutions (Glenny & Schmidlein, 1983), Virginia differs from most states in that enrollments are projected to increase significantly in the next decade. Based on 1987 projections of the U.S. Bureau of the Census, between 1988 and 1999 only nine states will experience a larger increase in the number of high school graduates than Virginia, and only one of those, Florida, is east of the Mississippi River (Chronicle, 1988a). Thus, Virginia is not caught in a "catch 22" position of contemplating a choice between maintaining enrollments at the cost of quality, or maintaining quality at the cost of declining enrollments

(Hutchings & Reuben, 1988).

Changes in SCHEV's Power Due to Assessment

Senate Bill 534

Suspensions of SCHEV's motives and the concerns expressed by some interviewees that assessment will give or has given SCHEV new influence and power in higher education were investigated. A former SCHEV staff member said, "I think [assessment] is widely viewed as an attempt to increase the central power of the Council.... A Code statement [inserted by Senate Bill 534] gives them another arena in which to nibble away and another rationale to nibble away." SCHEV was described as using legislative requests and resolutions to move in directions they are interested in, interpreting the language in ways that justified their actions.

The amendment to the Code of Virginia made under Senate Bill 534 added the following statement to the list of SCHEV's general duties:

To develop in cooperation with institutions of higher education guidelines for the assessment of student achievement. An institution shall use an approved program which complies with the guidelines of the Council and is consistent with the institution's mission and educational objectives in the development of such assessment. The Council shall report the institutions' assessments of student achievement in the biennial revisions to the state's master plan for higher education (Senate Bill 534, 1989).

In the specifications for the development of the guide-

lines the statement is consistent with policy and practice followed so far. By making it a matter of law rather than legislative opinion, however, SCHEV has more substantial authority to call upon institutions to comply with assessment requirements. Legislators were somewhat nonchalant over concerns that the bill enhanced SCHEV's powers relative to the institutions. One senator particularly close to assessment policy stated that if "it doesn't work out, we can change it next year."

An area of concern and some uncertainty of interpretation was that raised by the last sentence of the statement, that SCHEV will "report the institutions' assessments." Although SCHEV staff insisted that the bill would in no way change their long stated plans for reporting assessment summaries in The Virginia Plan, some institutional officials, and even Secretary Finley, admitted that the statement on reporting was vague.

While the bill provides potential for more strict reporting requirements and Virginia Plan summaries, for SCHEV to significantly expand its reporting requirements would violate at least two years' worth of promises and assurances to institutions, severely eroding their credibility with the institutions and possibly fomenting a political backlash that they could ill afford. University of Virginia President Robert O'Neil did not see even a statutory basis for assessment paving the way for a more powerful or pre-

scriptive role for SCHEV. He also did not think that the exit of Gordon Davies would permit a new SCHEV Director to use assessment to provide SCHEV with more power. He felt the promises Davies has made with regard to the uses of data and guarantees of institutional autonomy were more than personal; they were promises of "the office."

Assessment and SCHEV's Position in State Government

There is no expressed interest in or apparent support of, particularly within the legislature, seeing SCHEV become a "superboard" (Randall, 1989). According to the Senate's Bennett, "there are very few supporters for a centralized system or a board of regents or centralized board of control. Almost none." He explained that there is general satisfaction with the system of governance as it stands, although he described the Virginia system of higher education as "a loosely associated confederation of colleges" that makes "coordination very difficult." Such a system, in his view, creates "the incentive for each institution to act on its own" in seeking growth, whether in enrollments, academic programs, or physical plant." This characterization of Virginia higher education is one that most people in Virginia government seem comfortable with, although some staff members at SCHEV have publicly referred to the Council as a "strong coordinating board."

While it seems clear that over the last several years SCHEV has been able to use incentive funding and 'leverage'

to increase its ability to further an agenda for higher education, this has not been a simple matter of SCHEV's lust for power. SCHEV has responded to expectations for more affirmative leadership of higher education as a system. But in spite of the budgetary muscle found and flexed by SCHEV in the case of assessment, the Council remains largely dependent upon the goodwill of the governor and the legislature to compel institutions to move in directions they might be reluctant to go. Even the leverage gained by the Governor's 1987 connection of assessment to eligibility for incentive funding was perhaps not as potent an instrument as some have characterized it. In Finley's opinion, funding would not have been withheld from an institution more than once even if it continued to fail to comply with assessment demands.

The political clout and prestige of the premier institutions in the state, namely the so-called "public Ivies", the University of Virginia and the College of William and Mary, alone are probably sufficient to block a significant expansion of SCHEV's powers, if the institutions were serious about doing so. The major institutions have political influence, prestige, and funding resources beyond the public treasury to oppose SCHEV if they deemed it necessary (Ewell, 1988b; Finley, 1989; Gilley, 1989; O'Brien, 1989). But higher education is not a monolithic entity in state politics. Institutions in Virginia are heterogeneous, so insti-

tutional responses to assessment policy have varied greatly among institutions. SCHEV has sought to pursue actively its agenda with the institutions but at the same time has to walk softly enough to not initiate battles that it cannot win.

As Finley said, SCHEV's approach to assessment was in keeping with "political reality. If you want to get the idea accepted and something done with it in Virginia, our colleges and universities probably prevail." He noted that the institutions "haven't all gone along with [assessment] with equal degrees of enthusiasm," and added, "if you are a Council of Higher Education and want to survive and prosper -- you get into these questions [that raise issues of accountability] very slowly and deliberately. There's too much to lose." Potter also emphasized the necessity of Gordon Davies' "preaching" of the diversity approach to higher education policy "in order to survive."

Politically, institutional reactions to assessment were tempered because it had strong general support in Richmond, making open opposition a potentially bruising battle. If fighting it was not reasonable, then the institutions could work to shape the policy. SCHEV, having preached the merits of diversity for so many years, could not back out of its own rhetoric and appeals to Virginia's pride in its institutions, and had given the institutions the opportunity to "take the high ground", that is, to take the initiative and

the lead, to define the issues, and frame the debate on assessment.

Given Virginia's traditions in regard to higher education and the stated priorities of legislators, a major grant of new powers to SCHEV seems highly unlikely. Whether the legislature will move toward a more demanding posture toward higher education is also a matter of speculation. In the early 1970s there was significant support for expansion of the powers of SCHEV, but even with the strength of two strongly worded reports advocating such action, SCHEV remained a primarily advisory body (General Assembly Commission on Higher Education, 1974).

Assessment and Future Monitoring of Higher Education

The potential for assessment to pave the way for further programs to monitor the quality and processes of institutions of higher education has at least two dimensions:

- 1) additional procedures for program review; and
- 2) a more powerful quality criterion to couple with the traditional counting of graduates as a way of determining the "productivity" of academic programs.

To compel further institutional review procedures, Davies in 1987 urged that SCHEV establish a system for

program evaluation, using the leading scholars and educators in the nation to assess programs, starting at the doctoral and professional levels. Programs that do not pass muster should be placed on probation for a specific length of time, and

the institutions should develop plans to correct deficiencies. If they do not improve, they should be discontinued (Intro., p. 18).

Davies foresaw a process whereby SCHEV would bring consultants to Virginia to look at individual programs. He saw this as an extension of the program reviews done in the early 1980s, with outsiders brought in to "correct the problem of self-interest" that he saw as a fault of the former process. Although in 1988 SCHEV had to return money allocated for this purpose because there was not time to spend it, Davies plans to continue to develop evaluation programs of this type. He said that eventually, he wants "to convert the old system of self-study over into a system of study by outsiders."

SCHEV officials also indicated interest in seeing institutions expand evaluation/assessment activities to include other missions besides undergraduate education. While SCHEV staff expressed understanding of the time and resource demands of assessment and further evaluation programs, they also registered the opinion that higher education doesn't spend as large a proportion of its resources in "quality control" kinds of activities as business or industry. It was suggested that what seems excessive to academics may be minimal from another perspective. The debate over appropriate levels of evaluation and spending for evaluation is ongoing. The \$4.5 million allocated for assessment has been

referred to by both Davies and members of the Senate as a small amount compared to the total higher education budget.

SCHEV's Mike Mullen provided a more general vision of the kinds of reporting that assessment might engender. He foresaw SCHEV collecting aggregate data from the institutions to put together institutional 'health indicators' reports. He said that although assessment plans are far too different from institution to institution to monitor some kind of uniform reporting system, there is a great deal of interest in quality-oriented information and this interest will push SCHEV toward an 'indicators' kind of report.

Assessment and Program Productivity

The tie between assessment and the productivity review process was suggested in Davies' 1987 report to the State Council. Although the current statute governing the identification of unproductive programs essentially limits SCHEV to the counting of graduates as a measure of program productivity (Code of Virginia, 1.1, Section 23-9.6:1(f), Davies called the "greatest deficiency" in SCHEV's authority the "inability to close academic programs that are unnecessary or poor in quality" (1987, Ch. 2, p. 34). As a means of addressing this deficiency, he proposed that student assessment be used to provide information on quality to help identify programs that should be improved or closed. "If institutions... do not act to fix or close defective programs, the Council should seek authority to require that they do

so. A decision on this should be made within the next four years" (1987, Ch. 2, p. 35).

SCHEV staff offered various reactions to the idea that assessment might help identify unproductive or unnecessary programs on the basis of quality. Some pointed out that due to the nature of the process the only programs that fall under the axe are those that "students have walked away from totally." A few found the idea interesting but unlikely to be acted upon except as grist for informal discussions with institutions about the status of already questionable programs; others were completely opposed to the idea.

Davies said that he did not recall what he had written in his 1987 report in this regard, and expressed doubt as to the value of assessment for the kinds of decisions involved in identifying unproductive programs. He elaborated, noting first that "unnecessarily expensive" programs are very difficult to identify because there are no clear criteria that define what might constitute unnecessary expense. In terms of productivity, Davies suggested that simple measures of numbers of graduates tell nothing about the possibility that a given program might "be turning out a substantial number of graduates who are not socially productive." As an example of this, he described a blacksmith program that produced many well trained graduates who were unprepared for a role in a modern economy.

Senior officials within SCHEV and executive agencies

said that they could imagine the use of assessment information to help identify unproductive degree programs for termination, but thought that such decisions would be made within institutions by faculty and campus administration. It was generally held by those in state agencies concerned with higher education that such information might ultimately enter into discussions between SCHEV and institutions about termination of programs on the basis of productivity, but doubted that SCHEV would directly use such information in this way.

Within institutions the reaction to Davies' 1987 proposal was uniformly negative, although most people were unfamiliar with it until it was explained. While some defended the notion that the state has a right to expect quality programs within its institutions, few could believe that SCHEV would even attempt such a thing. One institutional officer said that he agreed in principle that poor programs that do not improve should be closed. However, he added, the case of teacher education showed that even with evidence of high levels of student performance on state mandated measures of competence, centrally directed elimination of academic programs and revision of curriculum might occur. In his words, "They have demanded restructuring of teacher education. We had a wealth of data saying that our students were doing great. So you can't talk out of both sides of your mouth. Which way do you want it?"

Assessment, SCHEV, and Academic Standards

Related to the identification of poor quality programs is the issue of whether assessment potentially gives SCHEV the opportunity to reach inside institutions in the area of academic standards. Finley denied that assessment opened this new territory for SCHEV. Like SCHEV's staff, he referred to it as an "ad hoc" situation, in which institutions find it in their own self-interest to rectify situations in which their graduates are not succeeding in some way. Finley said that in his experience institutions almost always respond to poor student performance on professional or licensing exams by seeking to improve the situation, and described the relationship between the state and institutions as "very good" and "healthy." He added that legislators are concerned about such matters, but their concern would be expressed in questions about what's going on, and not in telling institutions how to go about improving or threatening them in some way to compel a response.

Past SCHEV practice in this regard has mainly involved informal negotiations with institutions. Such informal processes have taken place over time and will continue. As one institutional officer pointed out, SCHEV staff have asked and will likely continue to ask questions about what an institution is doing and what it plans to do. He described this process as "an important fact-finding approach" that should not be discounted simply because it does not have "a

formal culture constructed around it."

SCHEV staff suggested that assessment information might be useful in informal discussions with institutions of the status of their academic programs. Davies' response to whether assessment represents a shift in policy, moving SCHEV into the area of academic standards, was "an emphatic no, as I see it." He added "the standards of an institution are the institution's prerogative. I believe that." The general position of SCHEV staff on the issue is that assessment asks institutions to show that they have established their own standards and are making serious efforts to adhere to them. One closely involved with assessment noted that SCHEV has not sought to interfere or dictate where or how standards are set, "but what happens based on that information." Institutions have been pressed to look at academic standards, "but what you look at [and] what you make of it is your baby."

Within institutions, the suggestion that SCHEV might directly influence internal academic standards was met with very strong opposition. As one academic officer said, the faculty "feel very strongly... that no one is going to dictate to them what curricular changes should result because of assessment." Most institutional officials were not concerned that assessment presents any kind of threat to the power of the faculty to set academic standards and shape the curriculum. If SCHEV were seen as directly intruding in

curricular decisions, there would be tremendous outcry from within the institutions, and little apparent support from legislative or executive offices for such activities.

Focus on Teaching and Learning

Some aspects of institutional priorities have been clear targets of SCHEV's activities. One facet of SCHEV's role, according to Miller, is "to call attention to what it consider[s] to be neglected parts of the enterprise." She believes that from the perspective of the "general taxpayer in Virginia" the undergraduate teaching mission of colleges and universities is a crucial part of why public funds are invested in higher education; "where that seems to be getting out of balance with other kinds of missions, I think it is our job to say, wait a minute, don't forget what you are primarily here for."

Thus an anticipated impact of assessment was to focus more attention on teaching and learning within the university. SCHEV's focus on the undergraduate curriculum and emphasis on assessment as a means to improve teaching and learning (Davies, 1987a) indicated the importance placed by policy makers on this function of higher education. There was a perception not only within SCHEV, but also the legislature, and the Department of Planning and Budget to some extent, that the undergraduate teaching mission of the universities had been shortchanged over time and needed a stimulus. Assessment was one way in which the state has nudged

institutions to respond to this concern. A senior member of the SCHEV staff said that assessment has helped SCHEV "change the focus away from economic development and research towards... undergraduate instruction." He said that such a shift in attention was needed and that the governor's interests lie in the area of instruction. The governor, he added, is "still interested in economic development, but not at the expense of undergraduate education."

Within institutions there were similar expressions of concern for what one senior administrator called the "flight from undergraduate teaching" in higher education. Research institutions do not recognize teaching as their number one priority, and regional institutions seek to emulate the research institutions. As a result, there has been some dislocation between the popular perception of the university as primarily a center of teaching and learning, and the perception of academics of themselves as scholars and researchers first and teachers second or third.

General Education

An issue that emerged to cause some concern within institutions as plans for assessment were developed and given form was general education. Some individuals held that SCHEV sought, as a means of shaping the undergraduate curriculum, to move in the direction of common standards for general education. Some institutional officers expressed serious concerns about what they saw as the negative poten-

tial of state promulgated standards or reliance on common testing instruments to damage important but difficult to operationalize aspects of undergraduate student learning and experience. All who commented on this issue in the interviews, however, suggested that such a task would be both monumental in complexity and doomed to failure and one that SCHEV would not seriously undertake. Even those who were most concerned that this was somehow part of SCHEV's plan could provide no clear evidence to support their contentions, and the situation appeared to be more an example of the "fondest hopes/worst fears phenomenon" than of SCHEV pursuing a hidden agenda of control or domination.

Assessment and the Homogenization of Programs

Although state officials have long emphasized their desire to protect diversity in Virginia public higher education, the tendency of institutions faced with requirements to conform to state standards is toward greater homogenization of structure and function (Dimaggio and Powell, 1983). Some opponents of assessment have argued that it would have a homogenizing effect on academic programs. However, state expectations for uniform assessment of general education that were feared have not materialized. Some thought that a "levelling" effect, ironically, may not come from the state's actions as much as from the potential for such in the effects of the Virginia Assessment Group (VAG). In seeking to help institutional officials address assessment

plans and reports, it was suggested that VAG may have inadvertently promoted imitation among the institutions. Ewell (1989a) said that institutions themselves will promote a homogenizing tendency in assessment programs if they come to regard assessment as no more than another reporting requirement of the state bureaucracy. He reported an "alarming tendency" nationally among institutions to rely on available standardized tests because they were seen as easy to administer and appropriate to the state agenda for assessment.

This "compliance mentality" is what may undermine opportunities to maintain institutional discretion in the assessment process. Poorly planned and executed strategies for assessment that aim at a minimum level of acceptable performance may result in impacts undesired by institutions and initially unintended by state policy makers, making institutional fears of standardization and escalating state intervention a self-fulfilling prophesy.

Uses of Assessment Data Beyond SCHEV Control

Research has shown repeatedly that information collected by governments or other organizational units is often used in ways unanticipated at the outset (Covaleski & Dirsmith, 1988; Dill, 1984; Feldman & March, 1981; Jacobsson, 1988; Rombach, 1988). SCHEV's repeated assurances that assessment information will not be used to compare institutions and will be strictly limited in any other applications do not guarantee that such will be the case. As a former SCHEV

staffer explained, there is a history of similar "assurances... from the State Council.... It is not that those State Council representatives were liars; but they can't control how people outside of their agencies control the information or use the information." Similarly, a SCHEV official said that in spite of sincere guarantees otherwise, "no matter what we collect the data for as its initial intent, it will be used for something else. That is just a fact of life."

SCHEV staff members described themselves as fortunate in the past in swaying the legislature to their point of view on data uses and reporting, but the composition and temperament of the legislature may change and greater demands for specific information may be forthcoming. They added that there are now members of the General Assembly who would like to see institutional data broken down by smaller program levels, but are not willing to put an additional reporting burden on the institutions to do that.

An institutional president who has unwaveringly supported assessment in Virginia agreed with this general view. He suggested that the collection of any data means that, regardless of assurances to the contrary, if a situation arises that calls for such data, they are available for use. He added, "It won't be a deliberate policy decision to use assessment [for example] to get rid of programs. If you do, what happens is we start playing with the assessment num-

bers."

Another institutional representative pointed out that Peg Miller and Gordon Davies are taken at their word that assessment information will not be used inappropriately at the state level. The concern was with "the press or ... the legislators who take this out of context and I'm afraid that Peg Miller cannot save us in that regard." Similarly, an institutional academic officer described the "danger of personalization" of assessment in Virginia, suggesting that assessment has become identified, both within institutions and statewide, with a few individuals. The appeal for personal trust and individual credibility was seen as "inevitable ... to some degree; but it becomes very person-centered and that is very dangerous."

The response of the legislature to assessment information provided by SCHEV will be crucial in determining the future of assessment policy in Virginia. Some of those interviewed, notably Musick, believed that the unsystematic information that will result from the process now underway will push legislators to call for a more standardized approach to measuring student learning and outcomes. SCHEV staff members noted that if the General Assembly wants comparative data, they'll get it. That does not seem likely at this point, but as SCHEV's Jim Alessio remarked, it is not possible to accurately predict what the demands for data will be. He said "we really have to wait to see how this

first run works out. There will always be that pressure to 'give us a table - can you summarize this and put it in one page?'"

Accountability and Autonomy

The appropriate role of state government in higher education involves broad goal setting, resource allocation, reasonable expectations for institutional accountability, and encouragement of those involved in institutional governance (Newman, 1987). Using these standards as a general guide, Virginia's assessment policy as it has evolved through the first half of 1989 has not stepped beyond generally appropriate state involvement in the affairs of higher education .

Inappropriate intrusion is defined by efforts to interfere in the affairs of colleges and universities to serve questionable ends or even to serve appropriate ends through questionable means (Newman, 1987). Assessment requirements in Virginia have so far avoided bureaucratic intrusion, since they have not involved unnecessarily elaborate state or system requirements or processes that interfere with the core functions of institutions. Assessment, it may be argued, is a function of an ideology that values technocratic approaches to public higher education and a nostalgic desire to recapture academic standards, but it is not accurately typified in Virginia as a case of interference in the affairs of colleges and universities solely on the basis of

some political ideology. Neither has assessment in Virginia been a product of interference in the affairs of higher education to promote the political interests of some group or individual in government.

A crucial issue in reviewing assessment policy involves the degree to which accountability expectations necessarily result in an erosion of institutional autonomy. In Virginia, accountability expectations have been minimized to emphasize the program improvement agenda. Whether this approach will prove successful remains to be seen. Within SCHEV there is uncertainty over whether assessment will work out as planned. The critical question is whether state officials can define system wide standards for effectiveness that make sense and don't compromise appropriate institutional autonomy. In Virginia, a twist in this scenario is that findings must be communicated in ways that satisfy those who are not looking for anything in particular.

Maintaining a Decentralized Approach to Assessment in Virginia

A key feature of the Virginia plan for student assessment has been the repeated emphasis on the institution-centered approach that has so far been followed. Whether this approach can and will be maintained is another important factor in predicting the future direction of assessment and related policy in Virginia.

While SCHEV may well have championed an institution-centered system for political reasons, since a decentralized

process might better survive and prosper in Virginia, this approach was also supported in recognition of the unique characteristics of each institution. A decentralized system can work well in encouraging initiative, imagination, and motivation, but relies heavily on the skills and intelligence of local administrators (Majone & Wildavsky, 1977; Mingle, 1983). Continued flexibility may be essential to the ultimate success of the assessment policy that has been championed by Gordon Davies, since successful policy implementation often requires ongoing review, interpretation, and compromise in order to adapt to changing situations and requirements (Bunker, 1972; Floden & Weiner, 1978).

SCHEV has received some criticism for the lack of clarity of its intentions and direction for assessment. While ambiguity or vagueness has troubled the assessment process, it may prove ultimately to be its saving grace. "Deliberate incompleteness" has been described as a potential means of providing a policy environment in which creativity and progress toward desired goals can go hand in hand (Jacobsson, 1988; Lindblom, 1980; Morgan & Tebb, 1989), particularly if planning and policy are not seen as ends in themselves, but as guides and opportunities for action and development of the viable and worthwhile programs envisioned (Harrison, 1985; Lilienthal, 1978).

Contrary to this view, general observation of centrally initiated program reviews suggests that they have often been

more responsive to the demands of bureaucratic procedure than to the unique features of systems of higher education (Jones & Ewell, 1987). Reporting requirements that emphasize compliance and strict but simplistic notions of accountability may result in perfunctory, patterned responses determined largely by organizational behavioral repertoires and an inertia that supports organizational tendencies to maintain past practices and relationships (Allison, 1971; Conrad & Pratt, 1985).

The stated purpose of assessment efforts in Virginia is to help institutions enhance their effectiveness, not to monitor or manage the details of institutional functioning (Ewell, 1985c; Davies, 1989; Finley, 1989; Lambert, 1989; Seaman, 1989). Whether this purpose can and will be maintained is at the root of concerns that assessment in Virginia will settle into the state's higher education bureaucracy as a matter of compliance and accountability. The crux of the matter is whether the the vagueness of SCHEV's guidelines for assessment has been deliberate or the result of uncertainty about how to proceed. If it is the former, institutional initiative will likely continue to be emphasized. If it is the latter, the possibility of a more rigidly prescribed reporting system looms larger.

The Future of Assessment in Virginia

Several institutional and state officials offered the opinion that it would take years of effort before assessment

provided some real sense of student outcomes, the most important and subtle of which may not be realizable for many years after students leave the university. There were very mixed opinions about the future direction of assessment in Virginia, although those who were most strident in their opposition and criticism seem to have been replaced or softened their positions. Within one institution openly hostile to SCHEV's assessment efforts, the campus leadership for assessment has shifted to a group of faculty and administrators much more willing to give the process a chance and who have found it much less threatening than did their predecessors.

The legislature seemed quite comfortable to wait and see what happens with assessment. Within the Department of Planning and Budget and SCHEV there was a positive sense for the way assessment has developed to this point and some optimism for its potential. These attitudes were reflected in the comments of Mullen shortly before the passage of Senate Bill 534. In regard to assessment, he said, "everybody is enthusiastic about what is happening. Nobody wants to push on it further, people are lined up with funding, [and] the Governor is trying to put it into the Code so that it can continue to be funded in the future."

Assessment in Virginia emerged as a policy initiative that was and continues to be seen by most policy makers as a positive program of self review for institutions. There is

little evidence of any kind that assessment will become more prescriptive unless institutions fail to a shocking degree to take advantage of the flexibility they have been so far afforded to provide appropriate messages of seriousness and good faith to elected and appointed officials in Richmond.

Chapter Seven

Virginia Assessment in Regional and National Context

Regional Standards for Assessment: The SACS Principles

Virginia's assessment policy was developed in the years immediately following 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 evaluation of conditions beyond traditional accreditation criteria of faculty and student quality, physical plant, and institutional resources, to include "the evaluation of the results of education and plans for the improvement of the institution's programs" (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1986, p. 6). While particular approaches to addressing effectiveness issues were not specified, it was held that institutional processes for planning and evaluation "should include":

- 1) broad-based involvement of faculty and administration;
- 2) the establishment of a clearly defined purpose appropriate to collegiate education;
- 3) the formulation of educational goals consistent with the institution's purpose;
- 4) the development of procedures for evaluating the extent to which these education goals are being

achieved;

- 5) the use of the results of these evaluations to improve institutional effectiveness (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1986, p. 9).

SCHEV staff were well aware of the SACS criteria for institutional effectiveness when they were laying the groundwork for assessment. It was intended that institutional assessment activities could be used to also satisfy SACS' new and more explicit criteria for effectiveness (Davies, 1988a; Dorsey, 1989).

National Standards for Assessment: The NASULGC Principles

In late 1988, four years after the SACS criteria were adopted, seven guiding principles regarding assessment practices in the states were approved by the governing board of the National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges (NASULGC). They urged that:

- 1) Institutional, program, and student outcomes assessment should focus, primarily, on the effectiveness of academic programs and on the improvement of student learning and performance.
- 2) States and institutions should rely primarily on incentives rather than regulations or penalties to effect student outcomes assessment and foster improvement.
- 3) Institutional programs for evaluation and assessment should be developed in collaboration with the fac-

ulty.

- 4) Assessment requirements should permit colleges and universities to develop institutional programs and define indicators of quality appropriate to their missions and goals and consistent with state-wide objectives and standards.
- 5) Colleges and universities should be encouraged to use multiple methods of assessment for improving teaching and learning and demonstrating achievement.
- 6) Requirements for assessment should be fiscally conservative and avoid imposing costly evaluation programs on institutions or state agencies.
- 7) Within an institution, assessment programs should be linked to strategic planning or program review, or to some comprehensive strategy intended to encourage change and improvement (National Association of State Universities and Land Grant Colleges, 1988).

Overall, the NASULGC principles advocate recognition of institutional autonomy and that standards and practices be developed by institutions themselves. The Virginia plan has largely followed such precepts, while predating the statement by two years.

There is considerable overlap in the principles outlined by these two organizations. Both emphasize the importance of faculty involvement in the development of assessment plans for institutions. Although in Virginia faculty

involvement was minimal on many campuses in development of the initial assessment plans, since 1988 there has been a much greater involvement of faculty in preparing institutional assessment plans and activities. This appeared to be a factor that helped reduce the intransigence of some institutions to the assessment mandate.

Second, both sets of principles suggest an important role for establishing clear purposes for assessment efforts, consistent with institutional mission and system-wide standards. The connection of assessment activities to institutional mission has been a fundamental premise of the Virginia model. SCHEV has repeatedly emphasized the need for institutional plans to grow out of mission statements and educational objectives. Senate Bill 534 stated specifically that institutional assessment programs must be "consistent with the institution's mission and educational objectives."

Third, while SACS statement number four refers specifically only to the need to develop procedures for the evaluation of institutional goal achievement, NASULGC statement one is more specific in suggesting that assessment should focus on academic program effectiveness and improvement of teaching and learning. Both, from the point of view of most state policy makers, are key arguments for doing assessment. While state officials have not indicated an expectation that institutions must report specific information on the degree to which a list of goals is achieved, they do expect that

assessment will provide institutions with information pertaining to their successes and needs for improvement. Additionally, the NASULGC principles emphasize the use of multiple methods of assessment, which has been strongly encouraged by SCHEV and by SACS accreditation guidelines (Southern Association of Colleges and Schools, 1986, p. 13).

Fourth, both SACS and NASULGC highlighted the connection of assessment activities to institutional planning and program review and improvement. In Virginia, SCHEV has repeatedly asserted that a primary purpose of assessment is to provide internal feedback on the effectiveness of the institution for the purpose of program improvement. This is a dominant theme among state policy makers - that assessment will provide institutions with information that will help them improve their programs, and thereby, their effectiveness. The connection of assessment activities to institutional planning has been addressed to varying degrees by the several institutions, but has especially been the case at James Madison University, where assessment was picked up as a means of bolstering a strategy aimed at campus change and strategic planning.

Fifth, NASULGC included a statement pertaining to the ways in which assessment should be promoted by states. Virginia has followed a 'carrot and stick' approach, providing for budgetary penalties and incentives, to stimulate institutional action on assessment. While the Virginia policy is

far from the performance funding mechanism of Tennessee or the budgetary penalties established by Colorado, the connection of the submission of assessment plans to institutional eligibility for initiative funding programs was a penalty threatened for non-compliance with the mandate. Since then, SCHEV has sought to push assessment by attaching incentives to the process.

Finally, the NASULGC principles comment on the need for fiscal restraint in the development of assessment programs. While officials and faculty in Virginia colleges and universities expressed some concern about the "hidden" costs of assessment, especially in terms of faculty and staff time and effort, state officials found the Virginia plan for assessment minimal in cost at \$4.5 million in 1988. Whether more expensive evaluation programs will follow in the wake of assessment remains to be seen, although SCHEV officials do plan further evaluation processes to be undertaken by the institutions. Historically, Virginia legislators have shown reluctance to place costly or complex reporting burdens on institutions (Alessio, 1989).

The SACS and NASULGC criteria regarding assessment are indicative of the framework for such activities that regional and national higher education associations have encouraged. The Virginia model for assessment seems generally to have maintained some balance in the sometimes opposing perspectives of the legitimate interests of the state

and the requirements of institutional governance and autonomy.

Virginia and Assessment in Other States

Counts of the number of states that have specifically called for assessment vary (Chronicle 1988b; Chronicle, 1989a; Ewell, 1989b; National Governor's Association, 1986). However, review of multiple sources suggests that as many as 26 states currently have at least some kind of policy to require, request, or encourage institutional activities pertaining to assessment of student outcomes (Boyer, Ewell, Finney, & Mingle, 1987; Carlisle, 1988; Ewell, 1989a, 1989b, 1989c; Fox, 1989; Hartle, 1986; Hillman, 1989; Krech, 1989; Maldonado, 1989). State policies vary from those that call for statewide testing of students, including Florida, Georgia, Tennessee, South Dakota, New Jersey, and Texas, to those that have sought to encourage institutional reporting on a variety of indicators of effectiveness as part of regular processes of review or as a separate process. These include Connecticut, Missouri, Rhode Island, Arizona, Illinois, Kentucky, and North Carolina.

Assessment in Virginia is marked by some important contrasts with other states that have mandated such activities. In states like Florida and Texas, legislators have been much more assertive than their counterparts in Virginia in pressing for assessment and evaluation activities in higher education. South Dakota and New Jersey have traditions of rel-

atively strong, centralized decision making in higher education, while Virginia higher education has tended to be more decentralized. In Missouri, Governor John Ashcroft personally challenged institutions to plan and implement assessment programs, while recent Virginia governors have been much less adamant in demanding change. Rather than rely on statewide testing or other prescriptive approaches to the assessment of student learning and outcomes, Virginia has followed a more institution-centered approach.

While states vary in important ways, some researchers have sought to compare state experiences with assessment. A recent study of five state assessment mandates (Ewell & Boyer, 1988, in press-a) found that in spite of the differences that distinguish the nature of policy initiatives from state to state, some conditions appeared similar:

- 1) State policy makers sought familiar models for assessment. Previous action in K-12 was described as a model turned to frequently by legislators. In Virginia, while the strong state reporting requirements for K-12 education were seen as indicating a reasonableness in asking for similar review in higher education, there was no sense that assessment in higher education was in any way a situation simply analogous to K-12. Perhaps if SCHEV had not acted early in the process to shape the ultimate assessment policy legislators might have found the K-12 model more appealing, but at this time SCHEV's vision of institution-centered assessment

holds sway in the capitol. Furthermore, there was no higher education equivalent to two conditions associated with K-12 education in Virginia in the mid-1980s: 1) the Governor's Commission on Excellence in Education, which in 1986 made recommendations for sweeping changes in public education; and 2) a broad sense that many schools were in need of real change, a sense heightened by such publications as A Nation at Risk.

From the beginning no single model or approach to assessment has been promoted above others in Virginia. In fact, after the first set of reports to SCHEV from James Madison University on its assessment pilot program, Gordon Davies used the JMU experience to support the contention that not only do different institutions have different characteristics that call for varying assessment approaches, but different mixes of such approaches are appropriate to different disciplines within institutions (Davies, 1988b, 1988c).

2) Problems of communication between states and institutions were evident. Ewell and Boyer found that the political nature of such communication seemed invariably to lead to conflict, with interpretations sometimes far out of step with intentions. Institutional officials were found often to misconstrue the motives of state assessment mandates. In each of the five states studied it was concluded that state policy makers were pursuing limited objectives that were

primarily oriented toward the improvement of undergraduate academic programs. Also found in each state was "a majority" of institutional representatives who believed that assessment was only the beginning of quantitative "statewide accountability plan that would ultimately result in common testing, common teaching, and common consequences for those not up to standard" (Ewell, 1989a, pp. 2-3).

As in other states, communication has proven a pervasive and difficult problem in Virginia. Although Virginia legislators and government officials have denied any desire to "dictate" policy to colleges and universities, institutional officials recall the state's recent willingness to mandate curricular changes through the restructuring of undergraduate teacher education programs. In other states, the example of Tennessee has shown that a moderately prescriptive assessment policy can escalate to higher levels of intrusion. It remains to be seen if states like New Jersey and Texas, where testing programs have been developed in tandem with assurances that the results will not be used in this way, will end up following such a pattern (Ewell, 1989a).

3) Tensions were found to stem from the incongruity between academic and political timetables. While conflicts over timetables for planning and implementation of assessment have been in evidence between institutions and SCHEV, it is not at all clear that these disagreements over the time frame in which assessment would occur have been the

result of an accelerated schedule based on political considerations. Only to the extent that initial institutional assessment plans had to be reviewed, approved, and budgeted by the end of summer 1987 in order to be considered by the General Assembly for funding was the timetable for institutional activities driven by the political one. In that case, many institutions, in waiting until pressed by the Governor's budget memo to undertake a serious response, exacerbated the compressed time frame to obtain funding for assessment.

4) There was a prevalent sense that early assessment mandates were largely interested in the use of standardized achievement testing. In Virginia this has not been the case. SCHEV has consistently emphasized the need to use multiple measures and approaches to assessing student learning. The only area in which it might be claimed that SCHEV staff have promoted the use of standardized tests is in regard to general education, and this remains an area of contention and uncertainty for many institutions.

5) There was a prevalent sense that assessment emerged without clear connections or integration with other policies and activities. In Virginia there have been some concerns that this was the case, but SCHEV has sought to couple assessment with other planning and reporting processes, including new program approval, Funds for Excellence grants, and SACS accreditation, as well as a future agenda that

includes evaluation of graduate and other academic programs and institutional missions.

Recent State Mandates

Contemporary with and following the Virginia mandate, most states that called for specific assessment activities have focussed on academic quality and effectiveness and have avoided simplistic approaches to accountability. They have, by and large, stressed institutionally designed plans and procedures appropriate to their unique needs and circumstances (Carlisle, 1988; Ewell, 1989a, 1989b). Since 1986 through the middle of 1989 no states have followed the centralized programs exemplified by Florida and Tennessee, and only two states have planned statewide testing - New Jersey and Texas.

As in Virginia, recent state assessment plans have had their origins in higher education agencies. In fact, since 1987 no state assessment mandate has emerged as a legislative initiative, suggesting that state higher education officials have taken the lead in responding to interest in central policy aimed at the improvement and insurance of program quality (Ewell, 1989b; Fox, 1989; Hillman, 1989; Krech, 1989). In seeking to anticipate legislative or executive interest in assessment, the higher education communities have been able to retain a great deal of discretionary authority over the shape of such activities and requirements. However, institutions and state higher educa-

tion agencies must address tasks of planning, implementing, and perhaps most importantly, reporting on assessment in ways that will be credible in the eyes of critical constituencies.

Virginia's case will be an important benchmark in seeing if flexible and broad reporting requirements can be appropriate and useful to both institutions and state officials. States now in the early stages of assessment have looked carefully at Virginia in search of a workable model of state assessment policy (Carrier, 1989; Davies, 1989; Ewell, 1989b; Mullen, 1989).

In most states, officials have not pressed for programs that compromise institutional autonomy (Ewell, 1989d), but they do expect meaningful activity on the part of institutions. As Adelman (1989) has suggested and events in Virginia corroborate, the key to the state interest in academic outcomes is assurance, or reassurance, that it can be demonstrated that things of value and importance happen to people as a result of being college students and that graduates have reasonable levels of skills to show for their degrees.

Virginia and New Jersey: Similar Rhetoric
-- Different Models

Among the states that have called for assessment, Virginia's approach contrasts in important ways with that of New Jersey. There, the state Board of Higher Education was the source of the assessment mandate, with highly visible polit-

ical support from the legislature and governor. In 1987 the state set forth a detailed state plan for assessment. Policy makers sought to develop a comprehensive approach without tying the process to strict and simplistic measures of accountability. Like their counterparts in Virginia, they have asserted that their interest is in stimulating improvement within the framework of institutional mission and initiative (Ewell, 1989a, 1989c; Kean, 1988).

Key differences between the Virginia and the New Jersey plans for assessment can be summarized briefly: where Virginia has given institutions very broad and general guidelines for planning, implementing and reporting on assessment activities, New Jersey has provided extensive guidelines and suggestions for institutional procedures and has devoted considerable resources to the development of a statewide test of general intellectual skills (Ewell, 1989b).

The crucial element of the New Jersey approach is the potential of the system to generate a uniform database that will facilitate judgement on the benefits of the state investment in higher education. The New Jersey program has been well-funded, has strong political support, and has been given a long time line for full development and implementation (Ewell, 1989c). If the New Jersey program fails to live up to expectations, it will provide a clear signal to other states of the difficulty of broadly defining and measuring higher education outcomes.

Both the Virginia and New Jersey assessment programs are now entering critical periods in their development and events over the next few years will demonstrate the viability and value of each. Both approaches may enjoy successes, in different ways and to different degrees. Indeed, the variety of state political, social, and economic environments suggests that variations on more or less centralized approaches to assessment may be appropriate to different states.

Summary and Conclusions

In Virginia, assessment has gradually been recognized as a tool that may stimulate institutional self reflection and a means by which institutions may demonstrate to state officials their commitments to quality and good faith efforts to systematically review and reform their own practice. In some ways it has emerged as a remarkable experiment. It has sought to challenge the notions that internal improvement and motivation for reform cannot be initiated from the top and that state agencies and policy makers cannot resist the desire for expanding control and data collection activities. Yet in spite of the lofty intentions repeatedly expressed by the architects of assessment in the state, considerable suspicions of the uses of state power to shape higher education remain unalleviated.

The primary findings of this investigation were that Virginia's assessment policy emerged from the combined

effects of a national movement that influenced policy makers as well as the interest of the State Council of Higher Education staff in using assessment as a means of advancing an agenda for undergraduate curriculum reform. Assessment in Virginia has been guided by general and somewhat vague guidelines and expectations for the process from SCHEV and other state officials.

At the state level assessment has so far emerged as an essentially symbolic form of institutional accountability, with most officials exhibiting no further expectations than that institutions demonstrate their seriousness and good faith in undertaking processes of self-review and evaluation. Assessment and related activities are seen by state officials as positive and logical components of necessary self-evaluation undergone by any agency or organization. Only a very negative report on the quality of institutional efforts might spur prescriptive action on the part of the General Assembly.

Over the next several years higher education issues of crucial importance to Virginia policy makers will involve matters directly related to tuition and enrollment levels and to the capacity of the system to accommodate the needs of increasing numbers of high school graduates in the 1990s. While in the foreseeable future it is likely that state officials will seek some expansion of review and evaluation of institutional programs, the data gathered from these

activities will probably be used for little more than gaining a general sense of what institutions are doing in regard to "quality assurance."

The evolution of assessment in Virginia is illustrative of the ways in which the policy making process involves organizational and personal interpretations and adaptations of existing conditions, ideas, and movements. A key factor in this process, as the difficulties with communication suggest, is that what a policy statement says is less important in some respects than what it is taken to mean.

Assessment has meanings that vary significantly among people involved with it. It is the propensity of these interpretations to shape actions, both individual and organizational, that makes communication of information and ideas so crucial to policy making. Policy is made by those who interpret it, and a state policy on assessment is filtered down through layers of state and institutional functionaries, each of whom shapes it in the image they see proper in light of legal, historical, political, economic, and personal relationships and constraints.

Assessment is only one recent manifestation of the tension between the state and the academy. Questions of the quality of educational programs and how best to review and improve them have been long standing and will continue to be grappled with. The same is true of many of the issues raised by assessment, exemplifying in many ways the overall

relationship between the state and higher education, part of what Bailey (1975) called a "persistent human paradox. The simultaneous need for structure and antistructure, for dependence and for autonomy, for involvement and for privacy" (p. 1).

Recommendations for Future Research

The study of assessment in Virginia raised a series of intriguing issues, related not only to assessment, but also to institutional governance and the making of higher education policy generally, that merit further investigation. Specific to assessment in Virginia, investigation of the effect of assessment on the internal practices and policies of institutions of higher education is certainly called for. Assessment will have a lasting impact on higher education to the degree that faculty, administrators, and students accept it as part of the culture of higher education.

The impact of policy oriented organizations, whether state, regional or national, on the formation and implementation of higher education policy is an issue of importance. Has the Virginia Assessment Group served as a valuable policy influence or a stimulus to undesirable homogenization? Can institutional alliances and consortia shape state policy without fueling an adversarial relationship with the state agency for higher education? How much influence do national and regional policy organizations like the Southern Regional Education Board, National Governor's Association, and

National Center for Higher Education Management Systems have on the formation of state policy?

On broader issues of policy making, questions of institutional governance raised include what the role of institutional presidents is in the making of state higher education policy. In Virginia, it was apparent that the acquiescence of the presidents to assessment had an important controlling effect on opposition to the policy from within institutions. Additionally in Virginia, do efforts to shape institutional policy through incentive funding and demands for assessment place SCHEV in conflict with the powers traditionally and by law granted to the institutional Boards of Visitors?

Assessment has also varied across states on the basis of the historical relationship between the state and higher education. An investigation of the nature of these relationships and their impact on assessment policy would be an important contribution to the understanding of how and why such policy varies from state to state. Such a study could logically grow from the work of Millett (1984) and Anderson (1986).

Problems of communication between SCHEV and the institutions were apparent through the course of this investigation. Ewell and Boyer's (in press - a) finding that the "misinterpretation" of state policy on the parts of institutional officials is a phenomenon that transcends state boundaries begs further analysis of the nature of communica-

tion between state authorities and colleges and universities.

The evolving role of accreditation agencies in the face of state assessment initiatives is yet another issue that calls for closer attention. Does or will state mandated assessment obviate the tradition of independent accrediting bodies? Comments from some of those interviewed as part of this study expressed very different views on this issue.

As the range of issues raised by this study indicates, assessment opens many questions pertinent to the relationship of higher education to the state. Assessment remains a primarily emotional and political issue, and as such touches some of the core beliefs and expectations of the public and its representatives and of those within colleges and universities as to the nature and responsibilities of higher education in American society.

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Appendix 2

Interviews

Alessio, J., Assistant Director - SCHEV.

Anderson, H., Member - Virginia State Senate.

Andrews, H., Member - Virginia State Senate.

Anonymous.

Anonymous.

Anonymous.

Ashmore, H., Associate Executive Director - Commission on Colleges, Southern Association of Colleges and Schools.

Bennett, J., Chief of Staff - Virginia Senate Finance Committee.

Boyer, C. M., Former Associate - Education Commission of the States Associate.

Briceland, P., Legislative Aide - Senator Clive DuVal.

Carrier, R., President - James Madison University.

Cook, J., Analyst - Department of Planning and Budget.

Covey, R., Staff - Virginia House of Delegates Appropriations Committee.

Cranwell, R., Member - Virginia House of Delegates.

Davies, G. K., Executive Director - SCHEV. DeVoursney, M., Assistant Provost - University of Virginia.

Diamonstein, A., Member - Virginia House of Delegates.

Dickinson, V. E., Member - Virginia House of Delegates.

Dorsey, B., Associate Director - SCHEV.

DuVal, C., Member - Virginia Senate.

Etkin, M., Analyst - Department of Planning and Budget.

Ewell, P. T., Senior Associate - NCHEMS.

Finley, D., Virginia Secretary of Education.

Gilley, J. W., Vice-President - George Mason University,
former Virginia Secretary of Education.

Gray, E., Member - Virginia Senate.

Gross, P., Provost - University of Virginia.

Henry, G., Virginia Deputy Secretary of Education.

Hereford, F., Professor, former President - University of
Virginia.

Irwin, T. D., Director of Assessment - James Madison
University.

Johnston, K., Director of Budget - Virginia Tech.

Keating, J., SCHEV Staff Member.

Kellums, S., Professor - University of Virginia.

Kemper, K., Legislative Liaison - Old Dominion University.

Lambert, B., Member - Virginia Senate.

Lavery, W., Professor, former President - Virginia Tech.

Lemmon, W., Chair - Governor's Commission on Excellence in
Education, former Member - Virginia House of Delegates.

Leone, P., Director - Joint Legislative Audit and Review
Commission.

Luth, F., Acting Dean, College of Education - James Madison
University.

McCartan, A., Member - SCHEV Staff.

McDiarmid, D., Member - Virginia House of Delegates.

McGlennon, J., Professor - College of William and Mary.

Miller, M., Assistant Director - SCHEV.

Miller, Y., Member - Virginia Senate.

Moomaw, E., Coordinator for Assessment - University of
Virginia.

- Mullen, J. M., Associate Director - SCHEV.
- Munford, J., Member - Virginia House of Delegates.
- Musick, M., President-elect - Southern Regional Education Board.
- O'Brien, J.W., Member - Virginia House of Delegates.
- O'Neil, R. M., President - University of Virginia.
- Philpott, A.L., Speaker - Virginia House of Delegates.
- Potter, D., Vice President - George Mason University, former Assistant Director of SCHEV.
- Ridenour, M., Vice President for Finance - Virginia Tech.
- Schewell, E., Member - Virginia Senate.
- Seaman, R., Head of Education Section - Department of Planning and Budget.
- Sedgwick, A., Dean of College of Arts and Sciences - University of Virginia.
- Slevin, K., Assistant Provost - College of William and Mary, Former Member - SCHEV Staff.
- Smith, A., Member - Virginia House of Delegates.
- Stepka, W., Legislative Liaison - American Association of University Professors.
- Warren, R., Vice President - James Madison University.
- Wilson, J., President - Washington and Lee University, Former Provost - Virginia Tech.

Appendix 3

Letter to Legislators

201 Burruss Hall
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
Blacksburg, VA 24061
December 5, 1988

The Honorable Hunter B. Andrews
16 S. King Street
P.O. Box B
Hampton, VA 23669

Dear Senator Andrews:

I am writing on behalf of Jeff Aper, a graduate student in the Educational Research program here at Virginia Tech. Jeff is currently engaged in important research into the ways in which state policy for higher education has developed over time as well as the ways in which such policy may be better informed and implemented. In order to proceed with this research, it is necessary that Jeff gain real insight into the ways in which planning, budgeting, and evaluating Virginia's public institutions of higher education are carried out.

It is my hope that you will be able to find fifteen minutes to half an hour of your valuable time to share with him your insights, interests, and concerns regarding the state's role in maintaining the quality of higher education in the Commonwealth. Jeff will be in Richmond in January and hopes to meet with you before the beginning of the new legislative session. He will be telephoning your office in the next week or so to see if an appointment during the first week and a half of January can be arranged.

Your assistance is genuinely appreciated. Ultimately, this research can be of real value to all of us who are concerned with the efficiency and effectiveness of institutions of higher education in Virginia. Thank you for your time and cooperation.

Sincerely,

Dennis E. Hinkle
Assistant Provost and
Director of Student Assessment

Appendix 4

Letter to Other Officials

201 Burruss Hall
Virginia Polytechnic Institute
and State University
Blacksburg, VA 24061
(703) 231-6122
January 9, 1989

Dr. Sylvia Scholnick
Assistant to the Provost
Wren Building
College of William and Mary
Williamsburg, VA 23185

Dear Dr. Scholnick:

I am a doctoral student in Educational Research at Virginia Tech, and am conducting dissertation research on the development of planning efforts and policy making at the state level for higher education in Virginia. Dr. Barry Dorsey suggested that I contact you to set up an appointment to discuss your experiences with and observations on state planning and policy processes for higher education. I will be telephoning your office in the next week or so to see if an appointment can be arranged sometime between now and the end of February.

Your help in carrying out this research is genuinely appreciated. I look forward to the opportunity of talking with you soon.

Sincerely,

Jeffery P. Aper

Appendix 5

Interview Guide

Institutions of Higher Education

1. When did you first become aware of what has now become the assessment movement in Virginia?
2. In your opinion, how does student assessment affect higher education in Virginia?
 - a. How does it serve the interests of the state? Examples?
 - b. How does it serve the interests of institutions of higher education? Examples?
3. Who were the key individuals or organizations in initiating Virginia's assessment policy?
 - a. What motivated their efforts?
4. Were any specific institutions under scrutiny by legislators or others?
5. Who within the higher education community were consulted when assessment policy was being discussed and developed?
 - a. How did they react?
6. When assessment was initially discussed with the presidents in GPAC, were concerns about instituting assessment activities expressed?
 - a. What were the nature of these concerns?
 - b. How were these concerns laid to rest? (presidents

seemed comfortable with both the initial resolution calling for assessment and the recent passage of SB 534 that made assessment part of the Code of Virginia.)

7. Since you have been involved in higher education in Virginia, what previous measures do you recall that have called upon colleges and universities to provide new or more detailed information to state agencies for purposes of state level planning, budgeting, or evaluation)?
 - a. What were the intended purposes behind these measures?
 - b. Who were the key individuals, agencies, or organizations calling for these measures?
8. Has assessment altered SCHEV's role in state government or its relationship with the institutions?
9. Does assessment provide SCHEV with broader authority to coordinate higher education in Virginia?
10. What is the relationship between assessment and SCHEV's authority to evaluate new academic programs?
11. Is there any relationship between assessment and initiatives to terminate unproductive academic programs?
 - a. Does assessment information help define criteria for productivity in academic programs?
12. SCHEV has articulated a number of means by which assessment will become a part of the regular processes

of colleges and universities. Current plans call for assessment efforts to continue to be tied to Funds for Excellence grants and institutional eligibility for funding of special programs in telecommunications, international education, and teacher education.

a. In your opinion, how strong is the possibility that assessment will go the way of program budgeting in Virginia - something that seemed like a good idea to a lot of people, but ultimately fell into disuse?

13. How do you think assessment information from colleges and universities will affect budget and resource allocation processes within institutions?

a. For example?

14. How do you think assessment information from colleges and universities will affect budget and resource allocation processes at the state level?

a. Why?

b. Why not?

15. Will assessment permit JLARC to undertake a more thorough and meaningful review of higher education?

16. How do you expect assessment information to be used?

17. How, in your opinion, should this information be used?

18. If you were to change student assessment in higher education in Virginia, what would you do?

a. Why? What are some examples?

19. Is it conceivable, due to budgetary constraints or

other exigencies, that the state could be compelled to close one of its public colleges or universities? How would such a decision be made?

a. On the basis of what evidence would institutions be rated to decide who received the "axe"?

20. Who else do you suggest that I talk to about these issues?
21. What documents or papers would you recommend as useful reading to provide more background on budgeting and/or planning for higher education in Virginia?
22. Is there anything else you would like to mention, or that I have not asked about that you think is important?

Appendix 6

Interview Guide

Executive Branch (Secretary of Education, DPB)

1. In your opinion, how has student assessment affect higher education in Virginia?
 - a. How will it affect higher education in Virginia?
 - b. How does it serve the interests of the state?
Examples?
 - c. How does it serve the interests of institutions of higher education? Examples?
2. Who were the key individuals or organizations in initiating Virginia's assessment policy?
 - a. What motivated their efforts?
3. Were any specific institutions under scrutiny by legislators or others?
4. Who within the higher education community was consulted when assessment policy was being discussed and developed?
 - a. How did they react?
5. Since you have been involved in higher education in Virginia, what previous measures do you recall that have called upon colleges and universities to provide new or more detailed information to state agencies for purposes of state level planning, budgeting, or evaluation)?
 - a. What were the intended purposes behind these mea-

sures?

- b. Who were the key individuals, agencies, or organizations calling for these measures?
6. How does assessment compare to the development of previous requirements for information from colleges and universities?
7. Have there been efforts since you've been involved with higher education in Virginia to develop standard measures of inputs into higher education?
 - a. Who promoted or opposed these measures?
 - b. Why?
 - c. How have these input measures been used?
8. Has there been interest in developing some kinds of output measures for higher education?
 - a. Who has promoted or opposed these measures?
 - b. Why?
 - c. What kinds of output measures would be useful and appropriate to state officials involved in planning and budgeting activities?
9. The state planning and budget manual (pp. I-5-2 and I-5-3) provides operational definitions for the following terms:

input

output

efficiency

effectiveness

workload

benefit

- a. Do these definitions provide clear criteria by which state agencies are evaluated for budgeting and planning purposes?
 - b. Do the definitions of these terms differ in any way for higher education from those used for other state agencies?
10. Does assessment provide the possibility of new measures of outputs, effectiveness, and efficiency for colleges and universities?
 11. Are other state agencies evaluated according to the measurement and analysis of inputs and outputs?
 - a. How does assessment compare to DPB evaluation procedures used for other agencies of state government?
 12. How do you think assessment information from colleges and universities will affect budget and resource allocation processes at the state level?
 - a. Why? Examples?
 - b. Why not?
 13. Has assessment altered SCHEV's role in state government or its relationship with the institutions?
 14. Does assessment provide SCHEV with broader authority to coordinate higher education in Virginia?
 15. What is the relationship between assessment and

SCHEV's authority to evaluate new academic programs?

16. What is the relationship between assessment and initiatives to terminate unproductive academic programs?
 - a. Does assessment information help define criteria for productivity in academic programs?
17. SCHEV has articulated a number of means by which they hope to make assessment part of the regular processes of colleges and universities. Current plans call for assessment efforts to continue to be tied to Funds for Excellence grants and institutional eligibility for funding of special programs in telecommunications, international education, and teacher education.
 - a. In your opinion, how strong is the possibility that assessment will go the way of program budgeting in Virginia -something that seemed like a good idea to a lot of people, but ultimately fell into disuse?
18. Will assessment permit JLARC to undertake a more thorough and meaningful review of higher education?
19. How do you expect assessment information to be used?
20. How, in your opinion, should this information be used?
21. If you were to change student assessment in higher education in Virginia, what would you do?
22. Is it conceivable, due to budgetary constraints or other exigencies, that the state could be compelled to close one of its public colleges or universities? How would such a decision be made?

- a. On the basis of what evidence would institutions be rated to decide who received the "axe"?
23. Who else do you suggest that I talk to about these issues?
24. What documents or papers would you recommend as useful reading to provide more background on budgeting and/or planning for higher education in Virginia?
25. Is there anything else you would like to mention, or that I have not asked about that you think is important?

Appendix 7

Interview Guide

Legislative Branch

1. What were the most important reasons for calling on Virginia's colleges and universities to carry out student assessment?
 - a. What did you hope would come out of it?
2. Who were the key individuals or organizations in initiating Virginia's assessment policy?
 - a. What motivated their efforts?
3. Were any specific institutions under scrutiny by legislators or others?
4. In your opinion, how does student assessment affect higher education in Virginia?
5. Do you think that assessment provides an opportunity to compare institutions of higher education?
 - a. If not, should it?
6. Will assessment permit JLARC to undertake a more thorough and meaningful review of higher education?
7. Has assessment altered SCHEV's role in state government or its relationship with the institutions?
8. Does assessment provide SCHEV with broader authority to coordinate higher education in Virginia?
9. What initiatives do you recall that have been undertaken over the last decade (or two) that have sought broader state level coordination of higher education?

10. What kind of information will you get from student assessment?
11. How do you expect assessment information to be used?
 - a. How, in your opinion, should it be used?
11. If you were to change student assessment in higher education in Virginia, what would you do?
12. If, due to budgetary constraints or other exigencies, the state were compelled to close one of its public colleges or universities, how would such a decision be made?
 - a. On the basis of what evidence would institutions be rated to decide who received the "axe"?
13. Have there been efforts that have been undertaken over the last decade (or two) to develop more standard measures of budgetary inputs into higher education?
 - a. How have such measures been used?
 - b. How do you think this kind of information should be used?
14. Do you think there is a need for useable output measures for institutions of higher education?
 - a. What kinds of output measures do you think would be useful and appropriate to state officials involved in planning and budgeting activities?
15. Is higher education treated the same as other state agencies in making budget decisions?
 - a. Should higher education be treated the same as

other agencies?

16. How do you think assessment information from colleges and universities will affect budget and resource allocation processes at the state level?
 - a. Why?
 - b. Why not?
17. Do you think that assessment should be used to help make decisions to terminate unproductive or poor quality academic programs?
18. Who else do you suggest that I talk to about these issues?
19. What documents or papers would you recommend as useful reading to provide more background on budgeting and/or planning for higher education in Virginia?
20. Is there anything else you would like to mention, or that I have not asked about that you think is important?

Appendix 8

Interview Guide

SCHEV and Other Higher Education Agencies

1. When did you first become aware of what has now become the assessment movement in Virginia?
2. In your opinion, how does student assessment affect higher education in Virginia?
 - a. How does it serve the interests of the state? Examples?
 - b. How does it serve the interests of institutions of higher education? Examples?
3. Who were the key individuals or organizations in initiating Virginia's assessment policy?
 - a. What motivated their efforts?
4. Were any specific institutions under scrutiny by legislators or others?
5. Who within the higher education community were consulted when assessment policy was being discussed and developed?
 - a. How did they react?
6. When assessment was initially discussed with the presidents in GPAC, were concerns about instituting assessment activities expressed?
 - a. What were the nature of these concerns?
 - b. How were these concerns laid to rest? (presidents seemed comfortable with both the initial resolution

calling for assessment and the recent passage of SB 534 that made assessment part of the Code of Virginia.)

7. Since you have been involved in higher education in Virginia, what previous measures do you recall that have called upon colleges and universities to provide new or more detailed information to state agencies for purposes of state level planning, budgeting, or evaluation)?
 - a. What were the intended purposes behind these measures?
 - b. Who were the key individuals, agencies, or organizations calling for these measures?
8. Has assessment altered SCHEV's role in state government or its relationship with the institutions?
9. Does assessment provide SCHEV with broader authority to coordinate higher education in Virginia?
10. What is the relationship between assessment and SCHEV's authority to evaluate new academic programs?
11. Is there any relationship between assessment and initiatives to terminate unproductive academic programs?
 - a. Does assessment information help define criteria for productivity in academic programs?
12. SCHEV has articulated a number of means by which assessment will become a part of the regular processes of colleges and universities. Current plans call for

assessment efforts to continue to be tied to Funds for Excellence grants and institutional eligibility for funding of special programs in telecommunications, international education, and teacher education.

a. In your opinion, how strong is the possibility that assessment will go the way of program budgeting in Virginia -something that seemed like a good idea to a lot of people, but ultimately fell into disuse?

13. How do you think assessment information from colleges and universities will affect budget and resource allocation processes within institutions?

a. For example?

14. How do you think assessment information from colleges and universities will affect budget and resource allocation processes at the state level?

a. Why?

b. Why not?

15. Will assessment permit JLARC to undertake a more thorough and meaningful review of higher education?

16. How do you expect assessment information to be used?

17. How, in your opinion, should this information be used?

18. If you were to change student assessment in higher education in Virginia, what would you do?

a. Why? What are some examples?

19. Is it conceivable, due to budgetary constraints or other exigencies, that the state could be compelled to

close one of its public colleges or universities? How would such a decision be made?

a. On the basis of what evidence would institutions be rated to decide who received the "axe"?

20. Who else do you suggest that I talk to about these issues?
21. What documents or papers would you recommend as useful reading to provide more background on budgeting and/or planning for higher education in Virginia?
22. Is there anything else you would like to mention, or that I have not asked about that you think is important?

Appendix 9

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 125

Requesting the State Council of Higher Education to study the quality of higher education in the Commonwealth.

Agreed to by the Senate, February 22, 1985
Agreed to by the House of Delegates, February 20, 1985

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

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

WHEREAS, 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

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

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

RESOLVED by the Senate, the House of Delegates concurring, That the State Council of Higher Education conduct a study on student achievement in Virginia's public higher education system, and to investigate means by which student achievement may be measured to assure the citizens of Virginia of the continuing high quality of higher education in the Commonwealth.

In conducting its review, the Council is requested to seek advice from Virginia's colleges and universities.

The Council should submit its findings and recommendations to the 1986 Session of the General Assembly.

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

Appendix 10

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

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*.

Appendix 11

1989 SESSION

LD6072128

SENATE BILL NO. 534

Offered January 17, 1989

A BILL to amend and reenact § 23-9.6:1 of the Code of Virginia, relating to duties of Council.

Patron—Lambert

Referred to the Committee on Education and Health

Be it enacted by the General Assembly of Virginia:

1. That § 23-9.6:1 of the Code of Virginia is amended and reenacted as follows:

§ 23-9.6:1. Duties of Council generally.—In addition to such other duties as may be prescribed elsewhere, the Council of Higher Education shall have the duty, responsibility and authority:

(a) 1. To prepare plans under which the several state-supported institutions of higher education of Virginia shall constitute a coordinating system. In developing such plans, the Council shall consider the future needs for higher education in Virginia at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels, the mission, programs, facilities and location of each of the existing institutions of higher education, in addition to such other matters as the Council deems appropriate. The Council shall revise such plans biennially in each odd-numbered year and shall submit within the time prescribed by § 2.1-394 of the Code of Virginia the plans as revised to the Governor and the General Assembly together with such recommendations as are necessary for their implementation.

(b) 2. To review and approve or disapprove any proposed change in the statement of mission of any presently existing public institution of higher education and to define the mission of all public institutions of higher education created after the effective date of this provision. The Council shall, within the time prescribed in (a) above subdivision 1 of this section, make a report to the Governor and the General Assembly with respect to its actions hereunder; provided, however, no such actions shall become effective until thirty days after adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such a report. Nothing contained in this provision shall be construed to authorize the Council to modify any mission statement adopted by the General Assembly, nor to empower the Council to affect, either directly or indirectly, the selection of faculty or the standards and criteria for admission of any public institution, whether related to academic standards, residence or other criteria, it being the intention of this section that faculty selection and student admission policies shall remain a function of the individual institutions.

(c) 3. To study any proposed escalation of any public institution to a degree granting level higher than that level to which it is presently restricted and to submit a report and recommendation to the Governor and the General Assembly relating to the proposal. The study shall include the need for and benefits or detriments to be derived from the escalation. No such institution shall implement any such proposed escalation until the Council's report and recommendation have been submitted to the General Assembly and the General Assembly approves the institution's proposal.

(d) 4. To review and approve or disapprove all enrollment projections proposed by each public institution of higher education. The Council's projections shall be in numerical terms by level of enrollment and shall be used for budgetary and fiscal planning purposes only. The student admissions policies for the institutions and their specific programs shall remain the sole responsibility of the individual boards of visitors.

(e) 5. To review and approve or disapprove all new academic programs which any public institution of higher education proposes. As used herein, "academic programs" include both undergraduate and graduate programs.

(f) 6. To review and require the discontinuance of any academic program which is presently offered by any public institution of higher education when the Council determines

that such academic program is nonproductive in terms of the number of degrees granted, the number of students served by the program and budgetary considerations. As used herein, "academic programs" includes both undergraduate and graduate programs. The Council shall make a report to the Governor and the General Assembly with respect to the discontinuance of any academic program ; ~~provided, however, no~~ . No such discontinuance shall become effective until thirty days after the adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such report.

~~(g)~~ 7. To review and approve or disapprove the creation and establishment of any department, school, college, branch, division or extension of any public institution of higher education which such institution proposes to create and establish. This duty and responsibility shall be applicable to the proposed creation and establishment of departments, schools, colleges, branches, divisions and extensions whether located on or off the main campus of the institution in question ; ~~provided, however, that if~~ . If any organizational change is determined by the Council to be proposed solely for the purpose of internal management and the institution's curricular offerings remain constant, the Council shall approve the proposed change. Nothing in this provision shall be construed to authorize the Council to disapprove the creation and establishment of any department, school, college, branch, division or extension of any institution which has been created and established by the General Assembly.

~~(h)~~ 8. To develop a uniform comprehensive data information system designed to gather all information necessary to the performance of the Council's duties. ~~Said~~ The system shall include information on admissions, enrollments, personnel, programs, financing, space inventory, facilities and such other areas as the Council deems appropriate.

9. *To develop in cooperation with institutions of higher education guidelines for the assessment of student achievement. An institution shall use an approved program which complies with the guidelines of the Council and is consistent with the institution's mission and educational objectives in the development of such assessment. The Council shall report the institutions' assessments of student achievement in the biennial revisions to the state's master plan for higher education.*

~~(i)~~ 10. To develop in cooperation with the appropriate state financial and accounting officials and to establish uniform standards and systems of accounting, record keeping and statistical reporting for the public institutions of higher education.

~~(j)~~ 11. To review annually and approve or disapprove all changes in the inventory of educational and general space which any public institution of higher education may propose and to make a report to the Governor and the General Assembly with respect thereto ; ~~provided, however, no~~ . No such change shall be made until thirty days after the adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such report.

~~(k)~~ 12. To visit and study the operations of each of the public institutions of higher education at such times as the Council shall deem appropriate and to conduct such other studies in the field of higher education as the Council deems appropriate or as may be requested by the Governor or the General Assembly.

~~(l)~~ 13. To provide advisory services to private, accredited and nonprofit institutions of higher education, whose primary purpose is to provide collegiate or graduate education and not to provide religious training or theological education, on academic, administrative, financial and space utilization matters. The Council may also review and advise on joint activities, including contracts for services, between such private institutions and public institutions of higher education or between such private institutions and any agency of the Commonwealth or political subdivision thereof.

~~(m)~~ 14. To adopt such rules and regulations as the Council believes necessary to implement all of the Council's duties and responsibilities as set forth in this Code. The various public institutions of higher education shall comply with such rules and regulations.

~~(n)~~ 15. In carrying out its duties and responsibilities, the Council, insofar as practicable, shall preserve the individuality, traditions and sense of responsibility of the respective

Senate Bill No. 534

institutions. The Council, insofar as practicable, shall seek the assistance and advice of the respective institutions in fulfilling all of its duties and responsibilities.

Appendix 12

CHAPTER 1.1:

CODE OF VIRGINIA

STATE COUNCIL OF HIGHER EDUCATION

§23-9.3. Creation and purpose; membership; terms; officers. - (a) There is hereby created a State Council of Higher Education for Virginia, hereinafter sometimes referred to as the Council. The purpose of the Council shall be, through the exercise of the powers and performance of the duties set forth in this chapter, to promote the development and operation of an educationally and economically sound, vigorous, progressive, and coordinated system of higher education in the State of Virginia. The Council shall be composed of persons selected from the State at large without regard to political affiliation but with due consideration of geographical representation. Appointees shall be selected for their ability and all appointments shall be of such nature as to aid the work of the Council and to inspire the highest degree of cooperation and confidence. No officer, employee, trustee or member of the governing board of any institution of higher education, no employee of the Commonwealth, except the Superintendent of Public Instruction, or member of the General Assembly or member of the State Board of Education shall be eligible for appointment to the Council except as hereinafter specified. All members of the Council shall be deemed members at large charged with the responsibility of serving the best interests of the whole State. No member shall act as the representative of any particular region or of any particular institution of higher education.

(b) The Council shall consist of eleven members appointed by the Governor subject to confirmation by the General Assembly at its next regular session. Of the first members of the Council appointed by the Governor, two shall be appointed for terms of four years, two for terms of three years, two for terms of two years, and two for terms of one year; one of the appointments made during the year nineteen hundred seventy to increase the size of the Council shall be for a term of two years, one for a term of three years, and one for a term of four years. Successors to the persons so appointed shall be appointed for terms of four years. All terms shall begin July one. Appointments to fill vacancies occurring shall be for the unexpired term.

(c) No person having served on the Council for two terms of four years shall be eligible for reappointment to the Council for two years thereafter.

(d) [Repealed.]

(e) The Council shall elect a chairman and a vice-chairman from its own membership and appoint a secretary and such other officers as it deems necessary or advisable, and shall prescribe their duties and term of office. (1956, c. 311; 1964, c. 597; 1970, c. 117; 1972, c. 210; 1974, c. 544; 1980, c. 728.)

§23-9.4. Employment of director and other personnel. - The Council shall employ and appoint a director who shall be the chief executive officer of the Council, and such personnel as may be required to assist it in the exercise and performance of its powers and duties. (1956, c. 311; 1974, c. 544.)

§23-9.5. Coordinating council for State-supported institutions of higher education. - The Council shall constitute a coordinating council for the College of William and Mary in Virginia, George Mason University, Longwood College, James Madison University, Mary Washington College, Norfolk State University, Old Dominion University, Radford University, the University of Virginia, Virginia Commonwealth University, Virginia Military Institute, Virginia Polytechnic Institute and State University, Virginia State University, Christopher Newport College and the Virginia Community College System, branches, divisions or colleges of any of the foregoing, and such other State-supported institutions of higher education as may in the future be established. (1956, c. 311; 1974, c. 544; 1977, cc. 296, 319, 413; 1979, cc. 2, 136, 145.)

§23-9.6:1. Duties of Council generally. - In addition to such other duties as may be prescribed elsewhere, the Council of Higher Education shall have the duty, responsibility and authority:

1. To prepare plans under which the several state-supported institutions of higher education of Virginia shall constitute a coordinating system. In developing such plans, the Council shall consider the future needs for higher education in Virginia at both the undergraduate and the graduate levels, the mission, programs, facilities and location of each of the existing institutions of higher education, in addition to such other matters as the Council deems appropriate. The Council shall revise such plans biennially in each odd-numbered year and shall submit within the time prescribed by §2.1-394 of the Code of Virginia the plans as revised to the Governor and the General Assembly together with such recommendations as are necessary for their implementation.

2. To review and approve or disapprove any proposed change in the statement of mission of any presently existing public institution of higher education and to define the mission of all public institutions of higher education created after the effective date of this provision. The Council shall, within the

time prescribed in subdivision 1 of this section, make a report to the Governor and the General Assembly with respect to its actions hereunder. No such actions shall become effective until thirty days after adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such a report. Nothing contained in this provision shall be construed to authorize the Council to modify any mission statement adopted by the General Assembly, nor to empower the Council to affect, either directly or indirectly, the selection of faculty or the standards and criteria for admission of any public institution, whether related to academic standards, residence or other criteria, it being the intention of this section that faculty selection and student admission policies shall remain a function of the individual institutions.

3. To study any proposed escalation of any public institution to a degree granting level higher than that level to which it is presently restricted and to submit a report and recommendation to the Governor and the General Assembly relating to the proposal. The study shall include the need for and benefits or detriments to be derived from the escalation. No such institution shall implement any such proposed escalation until the Council's report and recommendation have been submitted to the General Assembly and the General Assembly approves the institution's proposal.

4. To review and approve or disapprove all enrollment projections proposed by each public institution of higher education. The Council's projections shall be in numerical terms by level of enrollment and shall be used for budgetary and fiscal planning purposes only. The student admissions policies for the institutions and their specific programs shall remain the sole responsibility of the individual boards of visitors.

5. To review and approve or disapprove all new academic programs which any public institution of higher education proposes. As used herein, "academic programs" include both undergraduate and graduate programs.

6. To review and require the discontinuance of any academic program which is presently offered by any public institution of higher education when the Council determines that such academic program is nonproductive in terms of the number of degrees granted, the number of students served by the program and budgetary considerations. As used herein, "academic programs" includes both undergraduate and graduate programs. The Council shall make a report to the Governor and the General Assembly with respect to the discontinuance of any academic program. No such discontinuance shall become effective until thirty days after the adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such report.

7. To review and approve or disapprove the creation and establishment of any department, school, college, branch, division or extension of any public institution of higher education which such institution proposes to create and establish. This duty and responsibility shall be applicable to the proposed creation and establishment of departments, schools, colleges, branches, divisions and extensions whether located on or off the main campus of the institution in question. If any organizational change is determined by the Council to be proposed solely for the purpose of internal management and the institution's curricula offerings remain constant, the Council shall approve the proposed change. Nothing in this provision shall be construed to authorize the Council to disapprove the creation and establishment of any department, school, college, branch, division or extension of any institution which has been created and established by the General Assembly.

8. To develop a uniform comprehensive data information system designed to gather all information necessary to the performance of the Council's duties. The system shall include information on admissions, enrollments, personnel, programs, financing, space inventory, facilities and such other areas as the Council deems appropriate.

9. To develop in cooperation with institutions of higher education guidelines for the assessment of student achievement. An institution shall use an approved program which complies with the guidelines of the Council and is consistent with the institution's mission and educational objectives in the development of such assessment. The Council shall report the institutions' assessments of student achievement in the biennial revisions to the state's master plan for higher education.

10. To develop in cooperation with the appropriate state financial and accounting officials and to establish uniform standards and systems of accounting, record keeping and statistical reporting for the public institutions of higher education.

11. To review annually and approve or disapprove all changes in the inventory of educational and general space which any public institution of higher education may purpose and to make a report to the Governor and the General Assembly with respect thereto. No such change shall be made until thirty days after the adjournment of the session of the General Assembly next following the filing of such report.

12. To visit and study the operations of each of the public institutions of higher education at such times as the Council shall deem appropriate and to conduct such other studies in the field of higher education as the Council deems appropriate or as may be requested by the Governor or the General Assembly.

13. To provide advisory services to private, accredited and nonprofit institutions of higher education, whose primary purpose is to provide collegiate or graduate education and not to provide religious training or theological education, on academic, administrative, financial and space utilization matters. The Council may also review and advise on joint activities, including contracts for services, between such private institutions and public institutions of higher education or between such private institutions and any agency of the Commonwealth or political subdivision thereof.

14. To adopt such rules and regulations as the Council believes necessary to implement all of the Council's duties and responsibilities as set forth in this Code. The various public institutions of higher education shall comply with such rules and regulations.

15. In carrying out its duties and responsibilities, the Council, insofar as practicable, shall preserve the individuality, traditions and sense of responsibility of the respective institutions. The Council, insofar as practicable, shall seek the assistance and advice of the respective institutions in fulfilling all of its duties and responsibilities. (1974, c. 544; 1979, c. 619; 1989, c. 105.)

§23-9.8. Cooperation with State Board of Education. - The Council shall cooperate with the State Board of Education in matters of interest to both the public school and the state-supported institutions of higher education, particularly in connection with coordination of the college admission requirements and teacher training programs with the public school program. (1956, c. 311.)

§23-9.9. Preparation of budget requests; submission of budget requests to Council; coordinating requests; submission of recommendations to Governor and General Assembly. - The Council of Higher Education shall develop policies, formulae and guidelines for the fair and equitable distribution and use of public funds among the public institutions of higher education, taking into account enrollment projections and recognizing differences as well as similarities in institutional missions. Such policies, formulae and guidelines as are developed by the Council shall include provisions for operating expenses and capital outlay programs and shall be utilized by all public institutions of higher education in preparing requests for appropriations. The Council shall consult with the Division of the Budget and the Division of Engineering and Buildings in the development of such policies, formulae and guidelines to insure that they are consistent with the requirements of the Division of Budget.

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