Evaluating Assessment Practices and Culture Within a Student Affairs Office: A Case Study

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Bernadette Poerio

B.A. The Catholic University of America

M. Ed. University of Virginia

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University of Virginia
School of Education and Human Development Registrar
Office of Admissions and Student Affairs

Ehd-registrar@virginia.edu
Ridley Hall 102D
417 Emmet Street
Charlottesville, VA 22903

Capstone Approval Form

Student Full Name: Poerio,Bernadette [redacted] [redacted]

Department Name: Education Leadership, Foundations & Policy

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	Name	Department/University	Signature
Chair	Alan Leffers	EDLF, EHD, UVA	DocuSigned by: R. Alan Leffers 1BBB2E6D6887440...
Co-Chair (if applicable)			
Committee Member	Christian Steinmetz	EDLF, EHD, UVA	DocuSigned by: [illegible]
Committee Member	Karen Inkelas	EDLF, EHD, UVA	DocuSigned by: [illegible]
Committee Member			
Committee Member			
Committee Member			
Committee Member			
Student	Bernadette Poerio	Education Leadership, Foundations & Policy	DocuSigned by: Bernadette Poerio

ABSTRACT

The student affairs field has varying functional areas to support students throughout their higher education journeys. One functional area within student affairs is assessment, which involves regularly surveying students and utilizing data to make student support decisions. This paper is a qualitative case study of the assessment practices at the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office. The Education School is set at Research University, a large research university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. This case study examined the student affairs office's assessment practices and how they may align with Knefelkamp, Golec, and Wells (1985) Practice-To-Theory-To-Practice (PTP) Model. The PTP model, originally introduced in 1985, has eleven stages for student affairs professionals to progress through as they design, refine, and assess student support initiatives. The study also evaluated the culture of assessment present within the Admissions and Student Affairs Office at the Education School. Findings from this study answer the preceding research questions, as well as inform recommendations for practice for the office to undertake.

Keywords: student affairs, practitioner, assessment, PTP model, culture of assessment, case study

DEDICATION

To the students at the UVA School of Education and Human Development – you inspire me to be the best student affairs professional I can be. I know the future is in good hands with you at the helm.

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Chapter One: Introduction

Statement of the Problem

Student affairs is a critical component of American institutions of higher education that has evolved to a modern profession in the 150+ years since its inception. Student affairs has over forty functional areas, all designed to support students at institutions of higher education (CAS, 2019). These functional areas typically include enrollment management, financial aid, housing and residence life, counseling and student health, judicial programs, career services, recreational sports, and student activities, among many others (Sandeen, 2004). Within these functional areas, student affairs professionals design programs, services, activities, assessments, and interventions to support students while in college or graduate school.

A growing functional area within the student affairs field is assessment. Assessment is defined as “any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, departmental, divisional, or agency effectiveness” (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 18). Incorporating assessment and assessment data into student affairs is important since it helps support students in an informed manner. This data from assessments helps inform decisions at institutions of higher education (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Data from student affairs assessments helps practitioners to plan interventions or programs that align with stated educational goals, as well as expend appropriate resources on a program (Schuh et al., 2016). An updated definition of student affairs assessment includes the addition of examining program or initiative effectiveness (Schuh et al., 2016). Ewell (2009) maintains that conducting student affairs assessment results in accountability and improvement for student support programs. Remaining accountable and improving support initiatives is a critical component of infusing assessment into student affairs, as practitioners enter a feedback loop where they learn about their initiatives and can improve upon them (Mueller, 2019). Furthermore, conducting assessments helps student affairs professionals learn about student wellbeing, and then, design appropriate interventions (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996; Ewell, 2009; Schuh et al., 2016).

Additionally, assessment in student affairs is currently lauded as a matter of survival. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) ask if student affairs professionals are delivering on what they promised; further, are they delivering in a cost-effective, high-quality way? While research indicates that a student's integration into an institution's social system has significant implications for educational attainment, student affairs continues to face budget cuts (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Upcraft and Schuh (1996) state: "examples include substantial cuts in student activities and support for student government, reduction in career and psychological counseling staff, and outright elimination of programs and services considered less essential" (p.9). Here, Upcraft and Schuh demonstrate how the student affairs profession is negatively impacted by budgetary changes. They argue that student affairs assessment contributes greatly to the field. They state, "we see assessment as a way of making the connection between what we do, and how we contribute to the academic mission of our institutions and other institutional expectations" (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 12). Understanding the nature and importance of assessment within student affairs helps solidify how assessment will only continue to grow more essential to the field.

Student affairs practitioners often engage in practice when they design various assessments or educational interventions for their students. Depending on the functional area, these interventions can vary. However, these interventions are typically designed with one common end goal: support for a student's development. There is a salient model that outlines how student affairs practitioners can connect theory to their practice while designing and then assessing interventions, programs, or events to support students; this model applies student affairs theory to practice and is called the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model. The PTP model contains three phases, which are practice, theory, and practice again. Within the three phases of the PTP model, there are eleven stages for student affairs professionals to progress through when designing and then assessing various student initiatives. Further, since the PTP model both begins and ends with practice, many student affairs practitioners view it as iterative. The PTP model connects theory to practice, as practice allows for observation, which then raises the questions that theory attempts to answer (Mueller, 2019).

PRACTICE	THEORY			PRACTICE
PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION	TRANSLATION	PRESCRIPTION	PRACTICE
1. Identify pragmatic concerns 2. Determine educational goals and outcomes	3. Examine which theories may be helpful in this case 4. Analyze student characteristics from perspective of each theory base 5. Analyze environmental characteristics from perspective of each theory base	6. Analyze the sources of developmental challenge and support in the context of both student and environmental characteristics	7. Re-analyze educational goals and outcomes 8. Design learning process that will deliberately facilitate mastery of educational goals	9. Implement educational experience 10. Evaluate goals 11. Reevaluate and, if necessary, refine, redesign, reconceptualize, and amend use to other populations

(Mueller, 2019)

Above, the PTP model's three phases and eleven stages are evident. What may not be as evident is the iterative nature of the model, as it begins with practice before progressing to theory, and then returns to practice again.

Student affairs practitioners have implemented the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model when designing and then assessing their initiatives (Oxendine & Tau, 2023; Yu, 2014). West (2020) refers to connecting thought and action as a key principle of professional practice in student affairs. "This process is enacted formally and informally as student affairs educators, scholars, and practitioners engage in theory-informed practice and reflectively use practice to develop, critique, and refine theory (West, 2020; Hamrick & Kinzie, 2017). Furthermore, researchers have validated the PTP model as a useful tool for implementing programs and services within student affairs. Rode and Cawthon (2010) make the case for PTP model usage in planning orientation initiatives for new college students. In this usage, the authors offer the PTP model as a process model for linking theory to practice. Oxendine and Tau (2023) maintain that the PTP model provides a systematic and detailed approach to the application of student development theory to student affairs practice.

Student affairs practitioners can utilize the PTP model while designing and evaluating their student support programs, assessments, or initiatives. Thus, related to the PTP model is the notion of a culture of assessment. Incorporating theory into practice, and a culture of assessment, are connected in that including them in student affairs practice helps to strengthen student support initiatives (Grant-Vallone et al., 2003). A culture of assessment is defined as “an organizational environment in which decisions are based on facts, research, and analysis, and where services are planned and delivered in ways that maximize positive outcomes and impacts for customers and stakeholders” (Lakos & Phipps, 2004, p. 352). Operating within a culture of assessment allows for an environment that is high-quality and that provides common vision and purpose that are clearly communicated (Lakos & Phipps, 2004). Further, a culture of assessment is a culture that is built on trust. Building trust relates to the student affairs profession, since practitioners design student support initiatives that then build trust with students. Overall, creating and operating within a culture of assessment takes student needs into account (Lakos & Phipps, 2004).

This capstone project evaluates how a small student affairs office may or may not be in alignment with the PTP model. This will help the research site understand the extent to which their student affairs team is using and progressing through the stages of the PTP model, and using assessment effectively to improve its programs and services. Additionally, this project assesses the culture of assessment cultivated within the small student affairs office. Progressing through the PTP model and the culture regarding assessment has the potential to increase the efficacy of the student affairs office, and thus, improve the experiences of students at the research site.

Problem of Practice

This study examines a student affairs office within a small college set at a research university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States. The university's pseudonym is Research University and the small college's pseudonym is the Education School; this school serves around 1,700 students with a mix of undergraduate and graduate, residential and online, students. This capstone project focuses on the Admissions and Student Affairs Office (often referred to as the student affairs office) within the Education School. Due to the confined nature of this study, the design is a case study, which is "a detailed analysis of a person or group, especially as a model of medical, psychiatric, psychological, or social phenomena" (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, p. 91). The case study nature of this research project will result in rich and applicable data to the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office.

The student affairs office has a myriad of higher education professionals who work within various functional areas of student affairs, including student affairs/support, admissions, academic operations and the registrar, assessment and accreditation, and career services. There are also other professionals working in learning design and teaching innovation, but they are not included in this case study since they do not work with student assessments and are not student facing. Currently, the office's stated mission is "The Office of Student Affairs guides and empowers students to become their most authentic selves through a community of care and inclusion during their educational journey and beyond" (*Student Affairs*, 2021). The office conducts a variety of student surveys to assess students' wellbeing, as well as their sense of belonging. Professionals in the office deploy a Climate and Belonging Survey every two years to evaluate students' sense of belonging at the school. Another example of an

Education School assessment is the Pulse Survey; during the COVID-19 pandemic, the office began to distribute this survey to assess students' wellbeing and need for support resources. The office continues to distribute the Pulse Survey semesterly, which helps provide students with resources they may need. While collecting this data is important, it is uncertain if there is alignment with the PTP model's eleven stages. Furthermore, while assessments occur regularly, it is unclear whether there is a culture of assessment within the office.

This research study examines how the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office assessment practices align with Knefelkamp et al.'s PTP model, and whether a culture of assessment is present within the office. The research questions guiding this study are the following:

1. How do the current assessment practices of the Education School student affairs office align with the PTP model?
2. What is the culture surrounding assessment in the student affairs office?

Significance of the Study

The student affairs office supports future teachers, clinicians, therapists, and educators within the Education School at Research University. If these students feel supported, they graduate from the Education School and hopefully go on to be successful in their respective careers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005; Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991). Many colleges, including the Education School, design intervention strategies to increase supportive relationships on campus (Grant-Vallone et al., 2003). Through this model of support, students can develop positive relationships with faculty and staff, as well as feel more integrated into campus life. Furthermore, student retention and college commitment can increase through better support initiatives (Grant-Vallone et al., 2003; Milem & Berger, 1997).

Examining alignment with the PTP model can improve the assessment practices of the Education School student affairs office. Mueller (2019) maintains that student affairs professionals are in the business of creating and maintaining educational learning environments. Creating alignment with the

PTP model is helpful as practitioners analyze student environments and ground them in theory (Mueller, 2019). This study is significant because it examines if a culture of assessment is present in the Education School's student affairs office and will provide rich data informing the practices of that office. Further, building and sustaining a culture of assessment is critical, as assessment is vital to both the success of students and the student affairs office. Further, building a culture of assessment indicates that assessment is integrated into the everyday work process of student affairs practitioners. Building a culture of assessment indicates that student affairs professionals are good stewards of student data and thus, create positive change for students. Doing so also adheres to the office's stated mission of empowering students to become their most authentic selves through a community of care and inclusion (*Student Affairs*, 2021).

Organization

Chapter two of this capstone includes a review of relevant literature regarding student affairs, as well as assessment practices, organizational culture, a culture of assessment, and creating organizational change. This next chapter also details the chosen model that guides this research project, which is Knefelkamp et al.'s (1985) model of Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP). Chapter three explains the qualitative methodology (a case study) that will be used in this study, as well as data collection procedures and data analysis plan.

The last two chapters of this case study include findings and a discussion of the results. Chapter four details the findings from this case study; the findings are organized into several themes that are structured alongside the PTP model's eleven stages and the definition of a culture of assessment. The last chapter, chapter five, includes the answers to this case study's two research questions. Chapter five also includes recommendations for practice, which are grounded in literature and findings from data analysis. Lastly, this case study will conclude with considerations for future research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and PTP Model

The purpose of this capstone project is to evaluate how the assessment practices of the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office align with the eleven stages of the PTP model, as well as contribute to building and sustaining a culture of assessment. The student affairs office states that it guides and empowers students to become their authentic selves via a community of care and inclusion (*Student Affairs*, 2021). To help guide the research process, the capstone project's research questions are as follows:

1. How do the current assessment practices of the Education School student affairs office align with the PTP model?
2. What is the culture surrounding assessment in the student affairs office?

This chapter reviews extant literature regarding organizational culture within higher education. Following the section on organizational culture is literature briefly providing readers with an overview of the student affairs profession. Then, the study will discuss building a culture of assessment. The chapter concludes with an overview of the model guiding this capstone project: Knefelkamp et al.'s Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model.

Organizational Culture within Higher Education

Organizational culture is an essential component of all workplaces, but especially within institutions of higher education. The culture within an institution, along with their individual schools, departments, or offices, impacts the day-to-day operations, and guides staff to fulfill the stated mission and vision through their actions. Culture "denotes a historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic form by means of which people communicate, perpetuate, and develop their knowledge about and attitudes towards life" (Geertz, 1973, p. 29). Related to the traditional definition of culture is the concept of organizational culture, which exists through actor's (in this sense, staff, and stakeholder's) interpretation of historical and symbolic forms (Tierney, 1988). Further, these assumptions are identified through stories, special language, norms, institutional ideology, and attitudes that emerge from both individual and organizational behavior (Tierney, 1988). Masland (1985) also states that organizational culture induces purpose, commitment, and order, as well as provides meaning and social cohesion, and explains behavioral expectations. Organizational culture exists within a specific group, and can be viewed or acted on through norms, ideology, or attitudes from the group's stakeholders.

William H. Berquist wrote about different approaches to organizational cultures and institutions of higher education. Berquist stated that there are four cultures within the academy, which are collegial culture, managerial culture, developmental culture, and negotiating culture (Berquist, 1992). Of these four types of organizational cultures in higher education, the one most aligned with student affairs is developmental culture. Trowler (2008) maintains that developmental culture is one that finds meaning primarily in the creation of programs and activities furthering the growth of all members of the collegiate community. This can be seen particularly in the Education School's Student Affairs office's mission which is: "The Education School Office of Student Affairs guides and empowers students to become their most authentic selves through a community of care and inclusion during their educational journey and beyond," (Student Affairs, 2021). Within the student affairs office, the mission delineates a commitment to aiding in students' positive self-development. Furthermore, a developmental organizational culture aids in being a supportive organization, an important tenet of the student affairs profession. "The culture stresses the value of personal openness and service to others, as well as systematic institutional research and curricular planning" (Trowler, p. 5, 2008). Here, developmental culture also relates to the student affairs profession, due to its values of openness and service to others.

Identifying an office's organizational culture is important for a variety of reasons. One reason is that colleges and universities are not static entities, and thus, must evolve (Tierney & Lanford, 2018). Understanding organizational culture within higher education institutions allows administrators to make important decisions. Further, identifying a culture allows for adherence to institutional identity and acting in accordance with the stated mission (Tierney & Lanford, 2018). It also allows for the maintenance of effective communication channels; for mission statements to be effective, basic principles need to be enforced by leadership and administrators (Tierney & Lanford, 2018). Both recognizing an organization's culture, and knowing how to operate within it, allows the organization to act in accordance with its mission.

Overview of the Student Affairs Profession

Following the preceding section on organizational culture is a brief overview of the student affairs profession. Student affairs is an occupation typically within American institutions of higher education. The profession dates to the 1700s when it originated at colonial colleges, as college administrators would act *in loco parentis* towards their students*. In loco parentis,* which is Latin for "in place of the parent" helped define the relationship between American colleges and their students (Lee, 2011; Caple, 1998). *In loco parentis* ensured that colleges could regulate students' personal lives, which went beyond academics (Lee, 2011). College staff's administration of dormitories, monitoring the welfare of individuals, and disciplining students were the fundamental beginnings of the student affairs profession (Leonard, 1956).

The student affairs profession consequently evolved as the system of American higher education matured. Classical colleges eventually were reformed into liberal arts colleges, land-grant institutions, women's and technical colleges, and research universities (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). With these changes, faculty roles expanded, and a need for student personnel administrators emerged (Leonard, 1956; Rudolph, 1965; Nuss, 2003).

As the student affairs profession changed, and more students attended college, student development theories also began to emerge. The twentieth century saw the advent of the concept of "educating the whole student" and connections between the academic curriculum and extracurricular activities (Brubacher & Rudy, 1976; Nuss, 2003). Wolf-Wendel and Ruel (1999) maintain that the commitment to educating the whole person has been augmented and reinforced over the years, but that 1937 was an inflection point, when the American Council on Education published the first "Student Personnel Point of View." The Student Personnel Point of View was adopted in 1937 and within the document, the authors (of which there were 19) established the obligation of institutions to "consider the student as a whole" (American Council on Education, 1937, p. 3,). The report served as a guide for not only understanding the nature of student personnel work, but to further developments in the field (Dungy & Gordon, 2011).

Twelve years following the original Student Personnel Point of View came the 1949 iteration of the same name. In 1949, the American Council on Education revised the previous Student Personnel Point of View to incorporate a new philosophical basis for student affairs work, as well as include details regarding the elements of a comprehensive institutional program (NASPA, 2023). This updated document included more current guidelines and philosophies for the student affairs field, which are:

1. The student achieves orientation to his college environment.
2. The student succeeds in his studies.
3. The student finds satisfactory living facilities.
4. The student achieves a sense of belonging to the college.
5. The student learns balanced use of his physical capacities.
6. The student progressively understands himself.
7. The student understands and uses his emotions.
8. The student develops lively and significant interests.
9. The student achieves understanding and control of his financial resources.
10. The student progresses toward appropriate vocational goals.
11. The student develops individuality and responsibility.

12. The student discovers ethical and spiritual meaning in life.
13. The student learns to live with others.
14. The student progresses toward satisfying and socially acceptable sexual adjustments.
15. The student prepares for satisfying, constructive post-college activity. (*The Student Personnel Point of View*, 1937)

With these fifteen guidelines, the modern student affairs professional's role is evident. Then, the 1949 Student Personnel Point of View advocated for broader educational goals that included democracy, international understanding, and using higher education to solve social problems, which is clear in the mission of higher education institutions today (Dungy & Gordon, 2011).

After World War II, as enrollments climbed at American institutions of higher education, the student affairs profession grew as well. The Serviceman's Readjustment Act of 1944, colloquially known as the G.I. Bill of Rights, was passed in 1944 (Caple, 1998). This legislation directly resulted in increased enrollment at colleges and universities, as well as the popularization of higher education. "An enrollment increase occurred that almost overwhelmed many institutions as they sought to provide faculty, classroom space, and particularly housing for new students" (Caple, 1998, p. 69). Along with their enrollment, students brought an increased variety of needs to college (Dungy & Gordon, 2011). These needs fell out of the purview of typical faculty responsibility, and the student affairs profession welcomed additional practitioners.

At this time, there were many national groups founded to support college student personnel work. Some of these groups included the American College Student Personnel Association (first established as the National Association of Appointment Secretaries and then National Association of Placement and Personnel Officers) and the National Association of Student Personnel Administrators (to replace the National Association of Deans and Advisors of Men) (Caple, 1998). Further, this era of growth contributed to increased specialization in student affairs work; the base of college student personnel work was broadening to include other knowledges and skills in the expanding administrative and managerial roles (Caple, 1998).

History of Student Affairs Assessment

Originally, assessment in education was centered in traditional K-12 classroom settings, and not in the cocurricular sphere that student affairs inhabited (Gardner et al., 2010). As the various functional areas within student affairs grew and became more established, so did integrating assessment into the student affairs field. Recently, assessment within student affairs has become an integral part of the profession. Assessment is defined as any effort to gather, analyze, and interpret evidence which describes institutional, divisional, or agency effectiveness (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996). Further, there are several movements that contributed to higher education and student affairs assessment (Ewell & Cumming, 2017). These movements include the emergence of developmental and educational psychology in the 1930s and 1940s, which led to disciplined-based hypothesis testing and theory building (Ewell & Cumming, 2017). By the 1960s and 1970s, research on student attrition was a dominant focus; this era aided in the development of longitudinal studies, surveys, and multivariate statistics (Henning & Bentrim, 2022; Ewell & Cumming, 2017). The third movement was program evaluation, and the fourth movement was a focus on mastery of learning in the 1960s. This impacted assessment by centering student learning (Henning & Bentrim, 2022; Ewell & Cumming, 2017).

The roots of student affairs assessment exist in both iterations of the Student Personnel Point of View. Both documents call for the evaluation of student personnel programs; they also called for measuring student satisfaction with and use of programs (Henning, 2016; Henning & Bentrim, 2022). As the field has evolved and grown, the ability to play multiple assessment roles within student affairs is important. Hanson (1991) lists five types of roles student affairs assessment professionals should be prepared to play: conceptualizer, planner, coordinator, research technician, and interpreter. Each role is evident in the various assessments or initiatives that student affairs professionals design and implement.

Since assessment is an important part of higher education, introducing standards for assessment within student affairs assists in providing guidance on design, implementation, and evaluation of assessment procedures. The Council for the Advancement of Standards in Higher Education (CAS) was founded in 1979. In the forty years since its founding, CAS has assisted in promulgating standards of professional practice to guide higher education practitioners and their institutions in over forty functional areas of student affairs and higher education (CAS, 2019). The updated CAS Professional Standards for Higher Education from 2019 include standards for assessment practices at institutions of higher education. Further, CAS defines the mission of assessment services “to develop and implement a comprehensive assessment program that increases knowledge about students and the educational environment and leads efforts in continuous improvement and data-driven decision making” (p. 53). The CAS standards also maintain four steps within the student affairs assessment cycle; these steps are establish/revise goals and learning outcomes, provide learning opportunities, assess goals and outcomes, and use the results (CAS, 2019).

In addition to CAS standards, student affairs professionals that work in the realm of assessment also have guidelines provided by governing associations such as College Student Educators International (ACPA) and Student Affairs Administrators in Higher Education (NASPA). Both professional organizations have special interest groups dedicated to assessment. The ACPA established the Commission for Assessment and Evaluation, whose mission is to promote assessment skills and knowledge to facilitate and support student learning, development, and effective student affairs practice (ACPA, n.d., para. 2). The commission provides various resources to student affairs professionals interested in or working in assessment. Further, the ACPA released the Student Learning Imperative: Implications for Student Affairs in 1994. The imperative states that student affairs professionals should routinely collect information to redesign institutional policies and practices, as well as evaluate their programs and services (ACPA, 1994). NASPA also has a group to support student affairs assessment professionals, called the NASPA

SAAER (Student Affairs Assessment, Evaluation, and Research) Knowledge Community (Henning & Bentrim, 2022). At the 2007 joint conference of NASPA and ACPA, thirteen competency areas within student affairs assessment emerged:

1. Assessment design
2. Articulating learning and development outcomes
3. Selection of data collection and management methods
4. Assessment instruments
5. Surveys used for assessment purposes
6. Interviews and focus groups used for assessment purposes
7. Analysis
8. Benchmarking
9. Program review and evaluation
10. Assessment ethics
11. Effective reporting and use of results
12. Politics of assessment
13. Assessment education (Henning & Bentrim, 2022; ACPA & NASPA, 2007)

Here, the thirteen competencies within student affairs assessment are listed. While not every student affairs office utilizes these competencies, they are salient tools for success in a field of growing importance.

In recent years, scholarship of student affairs assessment has grown following the publishing of *Assessment in Student Affairs: A Guide for Practitioners* by Lee Upcraft and John Schuh in 1996. Student affairs assessment scholarship originally began with “how-to” guides outlining specific methods and strategies for implementing assessment (Henning & Bentrim, 2022). Student affairs assessment scholarship has since evolved, as there has been a need to demonstrate student learning (Gardner et al., 2010). In their 1996 book on student affairs assessment, Upcraft and Schuh make the case for integrating assessment into both higher education and student affairs. The authors refer to assessment in student affairs as a "matter of survival" that helps to answer the question "in an era of declining resources, are student services and programs really necessary?" (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, p. 8). Integrating assessment into student affairs helps to provide practitioners with important data to inform their practices, such as planning appropriate programs, events, or interventions. Further, Upcraft and Schuh (1996) maintain that there are seven components to provide a comprehensive assessment program within student affairs. These components include tracking use of programs, services, and facilities, assessing student needs, assessing student satisfaction, assessing environments and student cultures, assessing outcomes, assessing through comparable organizations, and using professional standards to assess. These components of student affairs assessment are cross-functional and help to inform assessment practices within various teams and offices within the field.

As higher education and political environments become more complex, focus on assessment has grown. It is important to involve student affairs professionals in institutional strategic planning and assessments (Henning et al., 2023). Accountability is continually emphasized in all types of education, particularly in higher education, as is evident in the current climate of student affairs assessment. Student affairs staff must assess more than student satisfaction; they need to demonstrate the cocurricular contribution of the field as well as demonstrate success in various student learning outcomes, all during a time in which higher education budgets are under scrutiny:

> Student affairs needs to demonstrate its central role in the academic success of students, and the potentially detrimental effect if student services and programs are curtailed, eliminated, offered differentially depending upon one's ability to pay, or handed off to community agencies which may or may not be prepared to handle students' demands. (Upcraft & Schuh, 1996, pp. 9-10)

While the importance of student affairs assessment cannot be understated, there are also challenges for those interested in assessment within student affairs. Henning and Bentrim (2022) maintain that budget concerns and lack of specific assessment staff have continued to persist in the field. Additionally, “the decreasing level of experience in student affairs and assessment, in particular, is a more recent concern, suggesting that more expert and seasoned assessment professionals are moving to more senior positions, retiring, and/or leaving the field” (Henning & Bentrim, 2022, p. 19). Henning and Bentrim also go on to state that graduate preparation programs should require assessment courses to help future student affairs practitioners. Professionals in the student affairs assessment field acknowledge the importance of incorporating assessment into student affairs; they also acknowledge how difficult it is do so when there are multiple challenges facing the field.

Within student affairs assessment is a specific strategy of conducting student surveys. This capstone project evaluates student survey practices at Research University’s Education School. The University of Virginia provides a salient overview of ten steps in deploying successful surveys. The most important steps related to this capstone project within the ten include developing a reasonable timeline, defining research questions, designing the survey instrument, selecting the survey sample, collecting data and keeping it secure, and analyzing and reporting the results (*Survey Practices | Institutional Research & Analytics*, n.d.) These steps provide an actionable roadmap for practitioners to take when designing and disseminating student surveys.

The importance of the role that assessment plays in student affairs is unmistakable. Student affairs practitioners are working to support students as their resources dwindle, and data from assessments can help to prove their case. The next section of this chapter will detail building organizational culture in higher education, which is foundational to build a culture of assessment within higher education organizations.

Creating Organizational Culture

Continuing this chapter's discussion of organizational culture, the student affairs profession, and the history of student affairs assessment is the notion of creating organizational culture. Understanding how to create organizational culture contributes to both building and sustaining a culture of assessment. Trice and Beyer (1993) state "creating a culture involves bringing a culture into existence that did not exist before. It entails innovation and although some parts of the culture may not be new, they are configured distinctively" (p. 414). Here, creating organizational culture is an important, but difficult, step to take by stakeholders of an organization. Further, when organizational leaders formulate ideologies and cultural forms and influence stakeholders to adopt them, it is a way to create culture, and thus, requires cultural leadership and vision (Trice & Beyer, 1993). There are eight considerations for creating culture, and they are:

1. Capitalize on propitious moments.
2. Combine caution with optimism.
3. Understand resistance to cultural change.
4. Change many elements, but maintain some continuity.
5. Recognize the importance of implementation.
6. Select, modify, and create appropriate cultural forms.
7. Modify socialization tactics.
8. Find and cultivate innovative leadership.

These eight guidelines for creating a new culture within an organization help demonstrate the importance of purposeful decision making within organizations. Those who wish to change the culture in organizations need to do so in incremental stages, recognizing the importance of working together as a team.

In addition to considerations for creating culture is the idea of changing it. As the world evolves, so do institutions of higher education, and thus, their cultures. "Cultural change calls for receptiveness amongst the collective for new ideas, values, and meanings. Without such openness- which may be facilitated by cultural changes in the society, business, or occupation or by a growing awareness of fundamental problems in the organization- cultural change is very difficult" (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015). Creating cultural change within an organization relies on an openness to new ideas and meanings from stakeholders. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015) outline a typical plan for creating cultural change:

> Step 1: Evaluating the situation of the organization and determining the goals and strategic direction.
>
> Step 2: Analyzing the existing culture and sketching a desired culture.
>
> Step 3: Analyzing the gap between what exists and what is desired.
>
> Step 4: Developing a plan for developing the culture.
>
> Step 5: Implementing the plan.
>
> Step 6: Evaluating the changes and new efforts to go further and/or engaging in measures to sustain the cultural change. (Alvesson & Sveningsson, 2015, p. 50).

These steps are common across all types of organizations, including institutions of higher education.

An additional viewpoint for scaling and creating organizational change is from Kezar, who presents three specific strategies for enacting change at an organization (2021). The first strategy involves creating opportunities for stakeholders to deliberate and have a dialogue. Within this dialogue, norms and values can change, and people accept new ways of operating (Kezar, 2021; Senge, 1990). The next strategy to scale change is to create, or connect with, networks with similar ideas (Kezar, 2021; Bryk, Gomez, and Grunow, 2011). The third strategy to scale change is providing mechanisms of support. These supports "might take the form of concept papers, frameworks, funding, awards, and recognition necessary to help sustain change agents in the face of entropy and even negative dynamics (Kezar, 2021, p. 37; Kezar, 2011). These strategies for creating and scaling change within an organization are salient examples of shifts that stakeholders can create or contribute to within an organization.

Building a Culture of Assessment

Building off creating organizational culture is the concept of a culture of assessment. A culture of assessment is defined as "an organizational environment in which decisions are based on facts, research, and analysis, and where services are planned and delivered in ways that maximize positive outcomes and impacts for customers and stakeholders" (Lakos & Phipps, 2004, p. 352). In the realm of student affairs professionals, a culture of assessment involves services planned for and delivered in ways that maximize positive outcomes for students and stakeholders. Further, an institution with a culture of assessment agrees on what is organizationally meaningful and what practices are required to fulfill its goals (Schein, 1999; Ndoye & Parker, 2010). As noted in the considerations for creating organizational culture, attention should be paid to the culture of an institution; it is impossible to create a culture of assessment without first noticing and understanding the current organizational culture and climate (Masland, 1985).

Creating an effective assessment culture requires stakeholders to look inward. Stakeholders must pay attention to the current culture surrounding assessment, as well as articulate a shared conceptual understanding, common definition of assessment, and the clear expression of assessment expectations and the use of results (Bresciani, 2005). Lakos and Phipps (2004) maintain that it is important to foster collaboration when creating and upholding a culture of assessment. They also state that a wide acceptance of diverse ideas, along with collaboration among staff, aids in a culture of assessment (Lakos & Phipps, 2004). The CAS standards for assessment services also maintain the importance of collaboration. The updated, 2019 standards state "regardless of the organizational structure, collaboration and consultation are imperative between and within Assessment Services with various individuals and departments and with institutional leadership" (CAS, 2019, p. 51). Here, collaboration amongst staff who conduct assessments is seen as imperative for the success of the assessments.

According to Ndoye and Parker (2010), there are several overarching strategies that assist with developing a culture of assessment. The first is integrating assessment into daily practice. The next strategy is utilizing institutional leadership. In utilizing institutional leadership, administrators implement a systematic approach to assessment that scales down throughout the office and/or institution (Ndoye & Parker, 2010). Another strategy to assist in developing a culture of assessment is the proper use of assessment data. Here, stakeholders can provide support in requesting and disseminating institutional data, as well as incorporating data in decision-making. The last strategy to develop a culture of assessment is communication, which is an integral part of any kind of organizational culture. Within the strategy of communication, direct and recurring communication with stakeholders such as faculty, students, and staff, is important. Sharing assessment results is a great way to involve stakeholders, as well as incorporating students in any type of assessment- information sharing.

While creating a culture of assessment is important, there are challenges in doing so. One such challenge is ineffective information systems that make sharing out data difficult (Brock et al., 2007). One example of an ineffective information system is how an employee's departure can greatly impact the work of an office. In 2023, the Education School's Director of Student Affairs departed her position. With her, she took institutional knowledge about previous assessments. There can also be inappropriate ways of responding to data, or the use of data, as a challenge to developing a culture of assessment (Brock et al., 2007). While partnering with leadership is a strategy in developing a culture of assessment, engaging with college and university leaders can be difficult due to competing priorities, busy schedules, or lack of bandwidth. Lastly, it can be challenging to sustain a culture of assessment, since it regularly requires communication, use of resources, and partnerships across institutions (Lakos & Phipps, 2004).

The next section of this chapter will detail the chosen model of this study, which is Knefelkamp, Golec, and Wells' Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model.

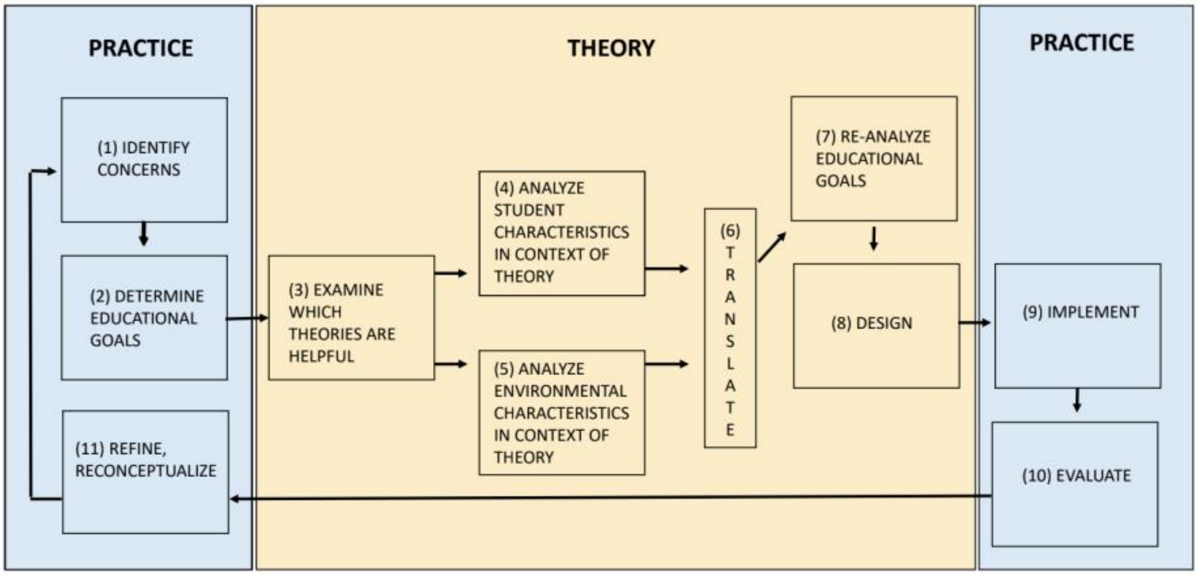
The Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) Model

The PTP model was first introduced in the mid-1980s and is a way for student affairs professionals to integrate both practice and theory intentionally in their work. Student affairs practitioners may engage with the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model when designing initiatives, assessments, programs, or interventions for the students that they serve. The PTP model is a process model, and not a theory (Mueller, 2019). The model was established to help bridge the gap between theory, research, and practice and aids student affairs practitioners in outlining actionable steps in their work designing student support initiatives, while also aiding in translating theory into practice. Originally, the PTP model was an offshoot of the Developmental Instruction model, which emphasized both content and process, and provided the first outline of the eventual PTP model in laying out seven stages used in designing a developmental classroom curriculum (Mueller, 2019). These original seven stages are:

1. Identify theoretical assumptions about the students and the institution
2. Select the population of interest
3. Assess the needs of the population
4. Choose appropriate subject matter and course content
5. Design methods that provide support and disequilibrium
6. Conduct the course
7. Evaluate and redesign the course (Knefelkamp, 1974).

The above seven-step process eventually gave way to the eleven stages as seen in the current PTP model.

The PTP model stresses the importance of connecting theory to practice, which many student affairs professionals work to emulate within their various functional areas, programs, events, initiatives, or interventions. The model maintains that practitioners should begin with practice, link it to theory, and then return to practice again; doing so is the essence of the PTP model (Mueller, 2019). The model also includes an eleventh stage for re-evaluation of initiatives, as well as potentially refining, redesigning, and reconceptualizing initiatives based on the data on hand. Additionally, the PTP model could also be viewed as an iterative process, in which practitioners progress through the eleven stages to begin at practice again.



Based on "A Systems Model of P-T-P" © Knefelkamp, Golec, & Wells (1985)
Modified by Mueller (2019)

Above is the PTP model as modified by Mueller (2019). Within the PTP model, there are eleven steps, which will be outlined throughout the rest of this chapter.

Step One: Identify Pragmatic Concerns

The first step within the PTP model is to identify a problem or dilemma that impacts students. "As student affairs practitioners, we create and implement a wide range of programs in our varied functional areas (Mueller, 2019, p. 16). Within student affairs, practitioners develop a wide range of programs in response to the needs that students display. Step one of the PTP model involves identifying pragmatic concerns (Mueller, 2019). Knefelkamp et al. (1985) proposed three questions to assist in defining these pragmatic concerns:

1) Is there a problem or troubling issue we need to resolve?
2) Is there something in place that we need to work on, enhance, or improve?

3) Do we want to initiative a new program or tailor a program used elsewhere to our own campus?

Answering the above questions will assist practitioners in identifying concerns as a piece of the first step of the PTP model. For example, Mueller (2019) provides an example of the PTP model in action with the evaluation of a student leadership program. Within the first step of the PTP model, stakeholders identify their concerns by answering the three questions above. In this case, staff identify concerns with tension amongst student leaders; therefore, the existing leadership program needs to be enhanced to address specific concerns (Mueller, 2019).

Step Two: Determine Educational Goals/Outcomes

Developing goals and outcomes for a program, initiative, intervention, or event is an important part of a student affairs professional's work. This step is critical, as it allows practitioners to benefit from the subsequent steps of theoretical analysis of students and the environment, as well as how that analysis will translate into the design of the intervention (Mueller, 2019). Within this step, there are both internal and external goals. There are two types of internal goals: content and development. Content goals involve knowledge, facts, or information that practitioners want students or stakeholders to learn, as well as concepts and principles they can take away from the initiative (Knefelkamp et al., 1985). Goal or outcome development involves the intellectual skills students or stakeholders should strive to attain following an intervention, program, or initiative (Knefelkamp et al., 1985). There are also external goals to consider, which refer to the broader implications of the intervention (Mueller, 2019). Revisiting the previous example of the student leadership program highlights how this step is a critical one. In that example, reflection allowed stakeholders to reconsider the goal of a program and then articulate specific education goals (Mueller, 2019). Identifying goals and outcomes is important because it helps answer the question "what do we want this initiative to accomplish?"

Step Three: Examine Which Theories May Be Helpful in This Case

With the two previous steps completed, this step in the PTP model makes way for student development theory. In this stage, student affairs practitioners can determine which theories can be relevant to their situations by addressing “what theories are helpful and answer the questions that I am asking” (Mueller, 2019, p. 18). Theories can be drawn from the psychosocial, cognitive, social identity, typology, and the person-environment realms (Mueller, 2019). At this step of the PTP model, student affairs practitioners must choose which student development theory makes the most sense to undergird their project, program, initiative, or intervention. Mueller (2019) also mentions how theories continue to evolve as the student affairs field continues to grow and become more diverse.

Steps Four: Analyze Student Characteristics from the Perspective of Each Theoretical Group

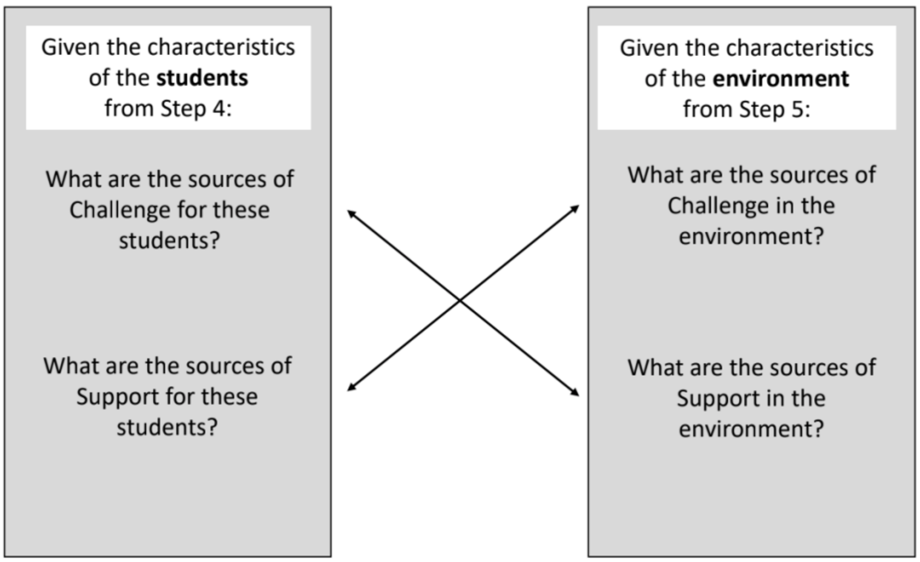
In step four of the PTP model, practitioners consider and describe students in terms of psychosocial and identity issues, the ways in which they reason about and interpret an issue or situation, and how personality types factor in to theoretical constructs (Mueller, 2019; Knefelkamp, 1981). Specific student data is also utilized in this step. Step four helps to explain why students may be behaving in a particular way and how they may be making sense of an issue (Mueller, 2019). It is a critical step within the model, as specific data regarding students is utilized for the first time.

Step Five: Analyze Environmental Characteristics from the Perspective of Each Theoretical Group

Step five of the PTP model utilizes the same lenses as the preceding step to describe the students and understand their environment (Mueller, 2019). At this stage, practitioners consider the environment to see what conditions may exist that may facilitate or hinder the development of students (Mueller, 2019). This stage of the PTP model acknowledges that learning and development do not occur in a vacuum, and that students are impacted by the world that exists around them.

Step Six: Translation

The sixth step of the PTP model begins translating theory into practice; this stage is also known to be notoriously difficult for practitioners. Knefelkamp et al. (1985) stated that this stage is the most critical within the PTP model. The translation process involves a deeper analysis of both the students and the environment (Mueller, 2019). From the analyses that occurred in stages four and five, sources of challenge and support for students in their respective environment(s) are examined and thus translated (Mueller, 2019). See the figure below regarding the translation process:



From "Chart for Step Six of the PTP Model" © Knefelkamp, Golec, & Wells (1985)
Adapted by Mueller (2019)

(Mueller, 2019)

As seen in the above diagram, the translation process involves a deeper analysis of both the students and the environment in terms of Sanford's notions of challenge and support (Sanford, 1962; Sanford, 1967; Mueller, 2019). Here, Knefelkamp et. al stated "the identification of specific sources of challenge and support is the major function of the translation process" (Knefelkamp et. al, 1985, p.22). Furthermore, this critical stage inquires given the characteristics of the environment, does it provide too little, enough, or too much support of students (Mueller, 2019). This step allows student affairs professionals to assess the match between students and their environments (Mueller, 2019).

Step Seven: Re-Analyze Educational Goals and Outcomes

This stage of the PTP model allows for student affairs practitioners to return to their original goals or desired learning outcomes. Following the analysis in the translation process, information may emerge at this point in the PTP model that may help practitioners decide if they need to re-evaluate the educational goals that were selected in step two (Mueller, 2019). At this stage in the process, the following questions may be asked:

1) Are the students ready for these learning goals?
2) Are the students not ready for the learning goals?
3) Are the students almost ready for the learning goals? (Mueller, 2019)

Step Eight: Design a Deliberate Developmental Intervention

Step eight of the PTP model addresses design. The literature that I engaged for this project included both “intervention” and “learning process” within the stage. This stage of the model continues to address the question “what will we do now?” (Mueller, 2019). Further, this step represents the manifestation of the learning environment that was envisioned and analyzed in steps two through seven and requires practitioners to consider how they will then structure the learning environment (Mueller, 2019). The goal at this step is to design a new learning environment that engages Sanford’s theory of challenge and support (Sanford, 1962). This new environment, or redesigned initiative, should challenge students to acquire new information, take on new roles, or attempt new skills (Mueller, 2019). It should also be an environment that supports students through those challenges.

Step Nine: Implement Educational Experience

Step nine of the PTP model signifies a return to practice. Mueller stated this regarding implementation in the student affairs profession: “…the implementation step is second nature to most student affairs practitioners; in applied field [sic] like student affairs we are always implementing policies, programs, and interventions” (Mueller, 2019, p. 25). Student affairs professionals often put some sort of plan into practice. There are two additional suggestions within this stage of the PTP model; one is beginning with a pilot, while the second suggestion is collecting data in a pre-test (Rodgers, 1986).

Step Ten: Evaluate the Educational Experience

At this stage of the PTP model, practitioners review how their policy, program, or intervention was completed, as well as measure if there was significant change among students. Here, practitioners can evaluate the degree to which the intervention accomplished the goals and expected outcomes, as well as the satisfaction with programmatic components of the intervention (Mueller, 2019). Within evaluation, there are four levels to assist in conceptualizing evaluation. These four levels can include evaluating satisfaction, evaluating learning, evaluating behavior, and evaluating external goals (Mueller, 2019).

Step Eleven: Refine and Reconceptualize

At this point in the PTP model, practitioners should review their initiative and amend it based on the feedback that was received (Mueller, 2019). Establishing a feedback loop is key in this process. Mueller (2019) maintains that assessment of interventions can also provide feedback on the institutional context or the culture of the institution.

The PTP model is an effective way to incorporate theory into student affairs practice. Identifying, comprehending, and utilizing the PTP model allows for student affairs practitioners to ask themselves “if I am interested in using theory, where do I start?” (Mueller, 2019, p. 33). The PTP model rightly demonstrates the need to begin with practice, which is highlighted by the first few steps of the model. These steps are identifying concerns and determining educational goals (Knefelkamp et al., 1985). Progressing through the steps of the PTP model can lead to deeper and richer insights about developmental design in creating and maintaining initiatives. Furthermore, the PTP model allows for student affairs practitioners to partner with students and other professionals in the field as its eleven steps continually reengages with important stakeholders. Additionally, the final steps of the model call for important assessment of student support initiatives to occur.

The PTP model is a salient tool to help improve both the work of student affairs practitioners and experiences of students. Yu (2014) maintains that utilizing the PTP model helps design and develop programs that benefit students. Furthermore, the PTP model helps to highlight the gaps between theory and practice, as student affairs practitioners often engage with work without properly visiting theory, and vice versa (Yu, 2014). Lastly, the PTP model can be used as a detailed methodology to help scholars and practitioners to identify an issue, link the issue to theories, and then explore the issue through research-based and theoretical evidence (Yu, 2014). The PTP model is an excellent way to demonstrate commitment to theory and practice in student affairs work.

With all eleven of its stages, the PTP model outlines how to design and implement a policy, procedure, assessment, or intervention. It applies well to all functional areas of student affairs, since it allows for the translation of theory to practice, and vice versa.

Chapter Summary

Chapter two provided an overview of pertinent literature regarding the history of student affairs, student affairs assessment, organizational culture, and building an organizational culture of assessment. At the conclusion of the chapter, the model guiding this capstone project, the PTP model, was explored and then summarized. Furthermore, reasons for utilizing the PTP model as a student affairs practitioner were offered. The purpose of this capstone project is to evaluate how the assessment practices of the Education School student affairs office at Research University align with the PTP model. The study also evaluates the culture surrounding assessment within the office. The next chapter, chapter three, will review the chosen methodology for this research project. Additionally, chapter three will review data collection, analysis, and management, which will help answer this capstone study's research questions on PTP model alignment and the culture regarding assessment at the Education School's student affairs office.

Chapter Three: Methodology

The purpose of this capstone project was to evaluate how the assessment practices of the Education School student affairs office at Research University align with the PTP model as well as evaluate the culture of assessment within the office. Knefelkamp, Golec, and Wells' PTP model guide this capstone project.

This study's research questions were as follows:

1. How do the current assessment practices of the Education School student affairs office align with the PTP model?
2. What is the culture surrounding assessment in the student affairs office?

This chapter outlines the chosen research methodology, which is a case study. The research site was the Education School within Research University. As the chapter progresses, I will review my data collection procedures, which are interviews and document analysis. Then, the chapter concludes with how I analyze and manage data, as well as the limitations and delimitations for this study.

Qualitative Research

The chosen methodology for this case study falls into the category of qualitative research. Qualitative research differs from quantitative research in that it takes biases and perspective into account (McMillan, 2015). Quantitative research can be conducted with minimal involvement from participants, as compared to qualitative research in which individual interviews or focus groups may slow the researcher down (Hancock and Algozzine, 2017). Qualitative research involves the researcher becoming involved with the research's subjects. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary instrument of data collection, and thus, spends a lot of time with research participants (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Harland (2014) states that "the qualitative paradigm consists of inquiry that requires an individual researcher or research team to analyze data that are open to various interpretations, and each inquirer's experience can provide a different understanding" (p. 3). There, it is evident how important the researcher is to a qualitative research study. Moreover, McMillan (2015) identifies eight key characteristics of qualitative research, which are: natural setting, direct data collection, rich narrative descriptions, process orientations, inductive data analysis, participant perspectives, socially constructed meaning, and emergent research design. A qualitative approach was best for this case study since it considers the researcher as an instrument. Furthermore, the design of this case study aligns with the qualitative characteristics McMillan identified in qualitative research. This study contains a natural setting (more information on the research site is below), rich narrative descriptions following interviews, and socially constructed meaning.

Case Study as a Methodological Design

This capstone project was conducted utilizing a case study methodology. Case studies differ from other types of qualitative research in that they are intensive analyses and descriptions of a single unit during a particular time-period that is clearly defined by both time and place (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017; McMillan, 2015). Insights and information from case studies can influence policy, procedures, and future research (Merriam, 2001). Examples of case study research contexts include a classroom, school, office, or academic department, as they are specific locations with a time-period. When a case study is conducted at a single site, it is known as a within-site or intrinsic single-case study (McMillan, 2015). For this capstone, the case study site was an office at college within a larger research university, and thus, a single-case study.

While conducting case study research, there are multiple sources from which a researcher gathers data (Creswell, 2007). As I conducted this case study, I gathered data via nine staff interviews as well as document analysis of past surveys and survey share-out events. More information regarding the data collection process is addressed in the data collection portion of this chapter.

There are several steps a researcher must take throughout a case study; the steps I took in this study are detailed below. The first step a researcher should take is to establish research questions that align with case study methodology. I crafted my research questions when I identified the problem of practice that I aim for this capstone to address. The second step is determining the specific nature of the case study, which can be intrinsic, instrumental, or collective. This capstone was an intrinsic case study because the focus was on a single location, the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office, to gain a better understanding of their assessment practices and their culture of assessment. This allowed me, as the researcher, to work with a focus of learning more about the specific office/organization, rather than identify broad findings about a phenomenon (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017).

There are many positive reasons to conduct a case study. One reason is that case studies are richly descriptive (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017). Harland (2014) states that case studies benefit the researcher undertaking the project, and once new information is gathered and applied to practice, others can benefit. Another positive reason to conduct a case study as a methodological design is the detail, thoroughness, and understanding they provide. This aids in authenticity, context sensitivity, and transparency (McMillan, 2015). These reasons contributed to my choosing to conduct a case study for this capstone project; I believe that the data I gathered will benefit other student affairs practitioners and their assessment practices and cultures.

On the contrary, case studies can be time consuming, as well as research intensive (McMillan, 2015). While a researcher is embedded in their research site, it may take a lot of time to build rapport and trust with participants, as well as glean helpful data. My positionality as a current employee helped ease this issue, as I have had a standing rapport with my colleagues that I interviewed. Later on in this chapter, my positionality as a current staff member in the office is addressed. Case study results can also be difficult to generalize at other research sites. For example, the happenings of one student affairs office within Research University may be very different than other offices at the university (or beyond), and thus difficult to replicate a similar research study. Lastly, case study research does not have a delineated end point (Creswell, 2013). A researcher must determine at which point to conclude collecting, analyzing, and sharing out research, which can be difficult.

Positionality

A researcher's positionality is instrumental to understanding their research design and process. Cresswell (2007) states that "the design process in qualitative research begins with philosophical assumptions that the inquirers make in deciding to undertake a qualitative study" (p. 15). There are several interpretive frameworks that can undergird research. The main framework that aided me in this study is my belief in social constructivism. Individuals seeking understanding of the world in which they live and work in is a social constructivist point of view (Creswell, 2013). The goal of research within social constructivism is to rely on the participants understanding and view of the situation (Creswell, 2013). This framework, as well as my own positionality, guided this capstone project.

Understanding and uncovering my own philosophical assumptions was essential as I worked through this capstone project, especially since I am a current employee in the Education School student affairs office, as well as an alumnus of the Education School. Positionality has been utilized in various social science capacities. Foote and Bartell (2011) maintain that a researcher's positionality is shaped by their unique mix of race, class, gender, sexuality, and positions of power in society. These personal components cannot be separated from an employee, regardless of where they work, or the work that they do. Bourke (2014) highlights how to incorporate one's own positionality into their research by offering an example of how his experience in student affairs impacts research that he conducts. "My experiences working with diverse undergraduate students in their living environments ultimately led to my interest in conducting qualitative research to learn more about the experiences of students of color" (Bourke, 2014, p. 2).

I currently work in the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office at Research University. My path to the student affairs profession is a common one (except for a brief detour in K-12 education). I was raised in suburban New Jersey in a white, middle-class family in the 1990s and early 2000s. A key piece of my childhood, and especially my adolescence, is that I was raised Catholic and was very involved in my church's youth group. With that group, I began to volunteer and first enjoyed helping people and serving others. This spurred me to attend a Catholic college from 2010-2014, where I was involved in extracurricular activities and service organizations. While in college, I was employed at the Office of Campus Activities. It was there that I was first exposed to the student affairs profession and became interested in pursuing student affairs as a career. However, before I could pursue student affairs, I previously committed to participating in an education reform program that hired me to teach in a Title I elementary school outside of Memphis, Tennessee.

From 2014-2016 I was employed as a third-grade teacher but was aware that student affairs and higher education was my true calling. At the conclusion of my two years in the classroom, I attended graduate school for higher education administration and student affairs at Research University's Education School. It was the first time in my life that I learned about topics that I was truly enthusiastic about, and I was excited to graduate and work full-time in the field.

Since graduating, I have worked full-time in student affairs at a community college and at the Education School at Research University. For four years, I worked supporting online students at Education School, until I transitioned to a new, more central role as Assistant Director of Student Affairs. In this role I support students in crisis and oversee student orientation to our school at Research University. I also coordinate graduation events, support student leadership and engagement, and manage the school's biweekly newsletter. Lastly, I work with other staff in the office to distribute various student assessments. The office is charged with a semesterly Pulse Survey, which assesses students' well-being and need for support services. The office also distributes a Climate and Belonging Survey every two years; this survey assesses students' sense of belonging at the school, as well as student's experiences regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. In my role, I help coordinate these surveys with our staff and the Director of Student Affairs. I help plan when they are distributed to students, assist with data analysis and data sharing, and adjust student support initiatives utilizing survey data. Additionally, I help coordinate pilot testing the survey with the Director of Accreditation and Assessment, as well as update questions that may need to be updated. Pilot testing the survey involves testing it within our office and then with various student leaders at the Education School. My involvement with student assessments spurred my interest in this research topic and helps cement the significance and importance of this case study.

Learning about my background and path to the student affairs profession helps to highlight my passion for this vocation. I love supporting students, no matter their backgrounds. Since being in the more recent and centralized student affairs role, I have witnessed the power that assessments and data have in our field. As a participant and administrator in this work of assessment, it is critical that I recognize my own biases that influence the research process in this capstone.

Research Site

This capstone project's research site is a categorized R1 university in the mid-Atlantic region of the United States; the institution's alias is Research University. Research University is a large university, with an enrollment of about 25,000 undergraduate and graduate students. The institution is comprised of twelve individual colleges which serve undergraduate and graduate residential students, as well as online learners. Of the twelve schools that comprise Research University, the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office is the specific research site. I selected this as the research site because, as a current employee in the office, I am interested in continuing to utilize our assessment data to support students and in engaging with the PTP model. I am also interested in whether my office and team are operating within a culture of assessment.

The Education School at Research University was established in 1905 and serves students across four academic departments. Currently, there are about 1,700 degree-seeking students at the school, in over forty programs of study within the four academic departments. The student affairs office at the Education School was established in the 1980s to support students throughout their academic experiences. Within the office, there are fifteen staff members; fourteen of these are full-time employees, while one is a part-time employee. These staff members work across various functional areas within student affairs and higher education including student affairs, academic operations and the registrar, admissions, assessment, and learning design and teaching innovation. Those working in learning design and teaching innovation were not interviewed for this capstone project, as they are not student-facing and do not design student support initiatives.

Participant Selection

Selecting research participants is a key part of the research process. Every empirical investigation or research study collects data from someone or something; these can be the individuals, groups, documents, sites, events, or other sources from which data are gathered (McMillan, 2015). Typically, in qualitative studies, purposeful sampling strategies are utilized to identify which participants will be providing data. Creswell (2013) maintains that there are three major considerations that contribute to purposeful sampling. The first is participants in the sample- here, the researcher reflects on who should be in the sample. They need to meet the criteria as outlined by the researcher. Next, there are multiple sampling strategies that researchers can undertake. For this capstone project, I utilized criterion sampling, which is when participants have specified characteristics and meet specific criteria (McMillan, 2015). Lastly, the size of the participant sample differs between various qualitative strategies. Within the chosen criteria for this case study, the sample size of current office employees that I planned to interview is ten; these ten employees meet the criteria that is outlined below (note- I interviewed nine staff members as one did not respond to my requests for an interview). My goal was to achieve data saturation, which occurs when the collection of new data no longer reveals added information (Creswell & Creswell, 2018).

When I selected participants for this research study, they met specific criteria. The established criterion for purposeful sampling directly reflects the purpose of the study and guides the researcher to information-rich cases (Merriam, 1992). Within purposeful sampling, typical case sampling was my specific strategy. Typical case sampling highlights what is normal or average (Creswell, 2013). For this research study, I interviewed eight employees from the student affairs office at the Education School. These employees are employed full-time in the office and have engaged with the various student survey assessments; they are also student-facing. There is also a part-time employee who has worked in the office for ten-plus years, and I included her in the sample because of her institutional knowledge. Additionally, I interviewed a former employee who departed the office after working there for seven years. As the former Director of Student Affairs, this participant was integral in planning and deploying the assessments and provided key information and context for my study. Further criteria for this study were past participation in the office's various assessments, which means that these employees should have experience with past assessment efforts. Since the office engages in multiple assessments throughout the academic year, it was important to connect with employees who support these assessment efforts and were familiar with the students of the Education School.

Data collection

Data Collection Procedures

I initiated the data collection process in December 2023. Before I collected data, I submitted my study and research proposal to the University of Virginia's Institutional Review Board (IRB) for approval on November 10, 2023. I received IRB approval on December 12, 2023. After IRB approval, but before I collected data, I connected with Education School stakeholders and informed them of my research project. I also gained permission from the Associate Dean to interview the office's employees. Then, after IRB approval on December 12, I reached out to participants that I identified who met the criteria above. The email that solicited interview participants (Appendix A) also included an information sheet about the study (Appendix B).

The next step in the data collection process was to schedule interviews with research participants. Each interview was approximately 35-55 minutes per participant; the interviews were conducted via Zoom. I recorded each interview, which allowed me to go back to a transcription of each interview to code them via Dedoose. Prior to all interviews, I contacted participants to remind them of the interview date, time, and Zoom link. Furthermore, prior to each interview I reviewed the research project, my research questions, and what I hoped to understand from each interview. I also obtained consent once more from each interview participant before the interview officially began. During the interview process, I took notes on participant behavior, responses, and nonverbal actions in reflexive journals. Doing so provided additional context to the interviews that was helpful throughout the data analysis process.

Another strategy I utilized to collect data is document analysis. Document analysis took place both before and throughout the interview process. This allowed me to reflect on participant responses while also engaging with existing Education School student affairs assessment materials. Reviewing the documents also helped inform the staff interviews. Documents are written records, which can be virtually anything (McMillan, 2015). Document analysis is a low-cost and unobtrusive way to obtain empirical data, which is helpful to me as I also work full-time and do not want to inconvenience my colleagues (Bowen, 2009). For this research project, the chosen documents were past surveys, as well as survey data share-out events, which are recorded Zoom meetings. The past surveys I analyzed were three Pulse Surveys, two Climate and Belonging Surveys, and two survey share-out events. The survey share-outs were the 2021 Climate and Belonging Survey Share-Out and the Spring 2023 Pulse Survey Share-Out. The list of documents I reviewed is in Appendix D and the document analysis protocol is in

Appendix E. In the following sections, I provide additional information regarding my data collection procedures.

There are strengths and weaknesses to my data collection procedures of interviews and document analysis. Interviews allow the researcher to control the conversation and obtain the information needed, as well as direct interaction allowing for the recording of nonverbal interactions and provide for historical perspectives (McMillan, 2015). This was helpful to me as the researcher because I observed my colleagues throughout their interviews. Because of our rapport, I could easily control the conversation; I also recorded their nonverbal interactions in my reflexive journals for each participant. Further, there are weaknesses when it comes to interviews as a form of data collection, which include participant and researcher bias and assuring anonymity (McMillan, 2015). These were difficult for me as a researcher due to my positionality as an employee in the office. While participants were all assigned pseudonyms, because of the small nature of the office, ensuring anonymity was difficult. Strengths of document analysis include that it is less expensive than other forms of data collection, provides alternative sources for triangulation of data, and can be more accessible (McMillan, 2015). These strengths helped me as a researcher to save money and increase trustworthiness throughout my data collection. Weaknesses of document analysis include how it does not allow for probing questions, data being difficult to comprehend and code, and documents supplying incomplete information (McMillan, 2015). Since I examined static surveys and survey share-outs from previous years, I was not able to ask probing questions or for additional context from past eras.

Interviews

Interviews help researchers learn more about the participants, and cases they are studying. For this research study, I gathered data via interviews. According to McMillan (2015), a well-conducted interview allows the researcher to capture the thoughts and feelings of participants in their own language. For this reason, I deployed a semi-structured interview approach, with open-ended questions.

A semi-structured interview occurs when potential questions (see Appendix C) are selected in advance, but the researcher decides the sequence and wording of the questions based on the flow of the interview (McMillan, 2015). Throughout the semi-structured interview process, I included clarifying and elaborating probes; clarifying probes provide an explanation, whereas elaborating probes seek more detail (McMillan, 2015). Based on participant responses, I also amended the question as needed. Further, the interview protocol (see Appendix C) included a variety of questions that addressed participant's experiences within the Admissions and Student Affairs office, as well as their hand in Education School student surveys. To ensure trustworthiness of the interview protocol, I presented the protocol with the chair of my doctoral committee, as well as doctoral peers who engage in qualitative research. My strategies to further ensure trustworthiness are addressed later in this chapter.

Since I deployed a semi-structured interview approach, I was flexible in my questioning, as participants reacted and responded in different ways. Merriam (1998) maintains that semi-structured interviews are a mix of more or less-structured questions, so I reacted and responded in real-time to participants. Since the research participants were my work colleagues, I believe that this flexibility was necessary due to the existing rapport that we have. Further, all interviews were recorded via Zoom, which assisted in developing interview transcripts. I also took notes during the interviews in my reflexive journals to ensure accuracy.

Throughout the interviews, I utilized several interviewing techniques as outlined in Seidman (2019). Some of these techniques included active listening, follow up on what participant says, asking participants to restructure their experiences, following up, keeping participants focused, exploring laughter that arises, and tolerating silence throughout the interview (Seidman, 2019). Below, I will expand on these techniques, as well as provide how I did so in each participant interview.

1. Active listening- Staying quiet and listening is the hardest work for many interviewers (Seidman, 2019). Further, interviewers should listen on three levels: what the participant is

saying, “inner voice,” and remaining aware of the process as well as the substance (Seidman, 2019). Throughout my interviews, I engaged in active listening via staying quiet, remaining aware of the process, and utilizing non-verbal communication techniques such as nodding and eye contact.

2. Follow up on what the participant says- The researcher asks questions they do not understand, as well as ask to hear more about a subject (Seidman, 2019). If I did not understand what an interviewee remarked, I asked follow-up questions to ensure understanding.
3. Follow up, but do not interrupt- Interviews can sometimes be more interested in something a participant is saying than the speaker is (Seidman, 2019). It is important to take notes while the participant is speaking, rather than interrupt the interviewee about the point they may have just made. Here, I continued to take notes throughout my interviews. I also followed up when necessary.
4. Ask participants to reconstruct, not to remember- Researchers should avoid asking participants about their memories, as impediments to memories can often pop up (Seidman, 2019). Instead, researchers should ask participants not to remember their experience, but rather, to reconstruct it. I addressed this when I asked interview participants open-ended questions.
5. Keep participants focused and ask for concrete details- Participants should be guided back to the focus of the interview (Seidman, 2019). This was particularly important for me as the researcher, considering my existing rapport with participants. I redirected the interviewees and asked for specific details when it was necessary. Staying focused during interviews with my colleagues proved to be more difficult than I anticipated; using these stages as a guide helped both me and my participants to stay focused.

6. Explore laughter- Laughter often conveys other feelings, so it is important to take notes throughout the interview process to revisit the conversation that was had (Seidman, 2019). Throughout the interviews, I ensured that laughter did not become a distraction.
7. Tolerate silence- Interviewers sometimes get impatient and uncomfortable with silence (Seidman, 2019). This is true in both professional and social settings as well. As a researcher, I was uncomfortable with this. However, I pushed through and tolerated silence as necessary throughout my interviews.

Knowing and utilizing the above interview techniques assisted me in becoming a skilled researcher. Furthermore, interviews were a salient technique for gathering information in case studies, as intensive information was collected (Merriam, 1998). This intensive information was then rounded out by data I collected via document analysis.

Document Analysis

As noted, documents are any written records. For this capstone project, the documents I analyzed were past surveys, and survey share-outs. Merriam (1998) maintains that data collection is guided by questions. For the document analysis piece of data collection, I returned to my original research questions. Appendix D contains the list of specific Education School documents that I analyzed. I also developed a document analysis protocol (See Appendix E). Within this protocol, I included the selection criteria and where the documents were located. Further, I also outlined inclusionary criteria. As for the analysis protocol, I journaled after reviewing the documents. I kept the journal in a password protected site at my institution; I will address this more in the data management section, as well as the data management appendix (Appendix F).

Establishing trustworthiness

Establishing trustworthiness in a study is incredibly important and can also be referred to as essential validity (McMillan, 2015). Trustworthiness and essential validity help answer the question "do the data and conclusions accurately, fairly, plausibly, and authentically portray reality?" (McMillan, 2015, p. 308). As the researcher, I cultivated trustworthiness via credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability (McMillan, 2015).

Credibility

Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain that ensuring credibility is an important factor in establishing trustworthiness. Further, credibility answers the question "how congruent are the findings with reality?" Credibility refers to whether results accurately portray the views and meanings of research participants (McMillan, 2015). There are several strategies to ensure credibility in a research project. These strategies include triangulation, reflexivity, member checking, peer debriefing, and clarifying researcher bias (Creswell, 2013; McMillan, 2015; Hitt & Lovette, 2021). Triangulation occurs when researchers make use of multiple and different sources, methods, investigators, and theories to provide corroborating evidence (Creswell, 2013). This typically involves evidence from multiple sources to shed light on a theme or perspective. Within the semi-structured interviews, I achieved triangulation by interviewing a variety of participants that met the established criteria. Additionally, I triangulated my data by comparing document analyses data to data collected via interviews.

Reflexivity occurs through critical self-reflection (McMillan, 2015). This, coupled with clarifying researcher bias, is significant because it involves critically reflecting on your own biases and opinions throughout the research process. Reflexivity requires the researcher to stand outside the research process and critically reflect (Adeagbo, 2021). Further, reflexivity, as well as researcher bias, requires scrutinizing the researcher's lived experiences, and how those experiences may impact the research process. There are three questions to consider through the reflexive process:

1. How has my personal history led to my interest in this topic?
2. How does my background influence my positioning in relation to this topic and my informants?

3. Where is the power held in relation to my research project and where am I in the power hierarchy? (Hitt & Lovette, 2021)

I answered these questions throughout the data collection process in the journal that I kept in a password-protected location. Clarifying researcher bias from the outset of a study was important so that the audience is aware of the researcher's position and potential biases or assumptions that may impact the inquiry (Merriam, 1998). These pieces were essential for me to consider and practice as a researcher, since I interviewed participants that I work with on a regular basis. To ensure these steps were met, I maintained a journal throughout the data collection process. The journal also detailed when the interviews were, as well as their length. I also practiced and demonstrated reflexivity by communicating about my research with my doctoral peers.

Member checking is the next strategy I used to establish credibility. Member checking occurs when the researcher solicits participants' views of the credibility of the findings and interpretations (Creswell, 2013). Member checking "involves taking data, analyses, interpretations, and conclusions back to the participants so that they can judge the accuracy and credibility of the account" (Creswell, 2013, p. 252). I member checked when I communicated the data to the participants. This was not as challenging as other steps, since I work with many of the participants on a regular basis. Sharing preliminary analyses is a key part of member checking (Creswell, 2013).

I member checked in two primary ways throughout the data collection process. First, at the conclusion of my interviews, I reviewed several themes that arose throughout our conversations. In this stage, I asked participants the following questions: "I noticed a few themes that emerged throughout this interview. Some of them are X, X, X. Do you agree? Did you notice any other themes?" Including these questions in my interviews helped me to review preliminary findings with the interview participants. Doing so also helped me to check my own bias as both the researcher and a colleague of the participants. Additionally, after concluding my interviews and as I began to write about my findings, I reached out to two interview participants to see if they were interested in further member checking. These two participants were interested, and I met with them individually. Throughout these two conversations, I presented my preliminary findings. These conversations were structured similarly to my research questions. The two participants confirmed my findings, but they also offered additional insight. One participant even stated “well, this is what I know to be true about our work.” This statement helped to confirm each participant’s own view and opinions about the work of the student affairs office. Member checking also helped me determine some of the more surprising findings from the interviews and document analysis. Because I am a colleague of the participants, we uncovered the surprising findings together. We also shared enthusiasm for the data.

Similar to member checking is the notion of peer debriefing. Peer debriefing involves an external check of the research process (Creswell, 2013). The peer debriefer can be a “devil’s advocate,” who is an individual that keeps the researcher honest, asks hard questions about methods, meanings and interpretations, and provides the researcher with an opportunity for catharsis by listening to the researcher’s feelings (Creswell, 2013). I partnered with a peer, who was a fellow doctoral student, and regularly debriefed with them throughout the research process. Working with this peer helped me to restructure my data analysis plan. The peer also helped me ensure there was a consistent theme throughout my entire case study.

Transferability

Another piece of establishing trustworthiness is transferability. Transferability is the degree of similarity between the research site, participants, and others (Hitt & Lovette, 2021). Transferability is the “appropriateness of applying the results (of a study) to other contexts and settings” (McMillan, 2015, p. 359). At this point, the researcher needs to assess whether it is appropriate to generalize (McMillan, 2015). Generalizing can be difficult within qualitative research due to many factors, but especially to differing cultures at institutions. However, providing thick, rich descriptions of the research context, and participant's responses, will allow future researchers to determine if the results are applicable to other contexts (Krefting, 1991). Researchers cannot predict what future contexts their research will be applied, so it is the current researcher's responsibility to provide appropriate descriptions of the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Once I collected the data, I utilized thick, rich description in my data analyses to help to achieve transferability.

Dependability

Dependability is another piece of establishing trustworthiness in a research project. Dependability is defined as "differentiating real perspective or behavior of respondents from reactive efforts of research" (Hitt & Lovette, 2021). Dependability shows that findings are consistent and could be repeated (Amankwaa, 2016). To establish dependability, Lincoln and Guba (1985) suggest a technique known as an inquiry audit. Inquiry audits are conducted by having a researcher that is not involved in the research process examine the process and the product of the research study. This is like peer debriefing, and it helps to evaluate the accuracy of the data, as well as whether or not the findings, interpretations, and conclusions are supported by the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). As noted, I engaged with a doctoral peer throughout the research process. Further, I included important audit trail details in the journal I kept. This helped establish trustworthiness throughout my research study.

Confirmability

Lastly, confirmability is the final piece in establishing trustworthiness. Confirmability is the degree of neutrality or the extent to which the findings of a study are shaped by the respondents and not researcher bias, motivation, or interest (Amankwaa, 2016). Confirmability can be established via triangulation and journaling. As a reminder, triangulation occurs from utilizing different data sources (McMillan, 2015). I established confirmability when I had a peer review my journal and early interpretations of my data.

Ethical considerations

Conducting research in an ethical manner is key to conducting strong research. Since the 1940s, research has been more considerate of ethical factors (Merriam, 1998). Further, Stake (1994) states "qualitative researchers are guests in the private spaces of the world. Their manners should be good and their code of ethics strict" (p. 244). I worked toward ethical considerations when I obtained permission from the University's Institutional Review Board (UVA IRB). I then received consent from participants; this occurred verbally at the outset of their interviews (see Appendix C). McMillan (2015) maintains that obtaining informed consent is directly related to ethical considerations, as well as demonstrating the respect for persons principle. Furthermore, since I interviewed Education School staff members, in my email recruiting them to my study, I included an offer to book a private room that was not their office to participate in the interview. Doing so helped to avoid discomfort, it also helped navigate the power dynamics between employees and their supervisors in the office.

Data analysis

Following data collection procedures, I began to analyze the data I collected. Interviews and document analysis techniques resulted in a large amount of data, which was then summarized and interpreted (McMillan, 2015). Data analysis is an iterative process that occurs throughout data collection, as well as after (during the official data analysis portion of a research project). McMillan (2015) states that there are specific steps to take throughout the data analysis process. First, data should be organized within digestible sections or units. At this stage, I organized data in OneDrive folders that are password protected. The data was words from Zoom transcriptions, which were completed from the Zoom interviews. Following data organization is reading and memoing the data (Creswell, 2013). Writing notes or memos in the margins of transcripts helps in this phase of exploring the data (Creswell, 2013). I did so throughout my reflexive journals from each interview and document that I analyzed.

The next step of data analysis is to describe, classify, and interpret the data into codes and themes (Creswell, 2013). Here, I moved from reading and memoing to describing and classifying the data. I did this in Dedoose, which is a cloud-based application for qualitative data analysis. Then, I moved to data interpretation. Interpretation of the data involves making sense of the data, as well as the lessons learned from the data (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). Creswell (2013) maintains that interpretation in qualitative research “involves abstracting out beyond the codes and themes to the larger meaning of the data” (p. 187). Here, I connected my data to existing and relevant literature. The last step of data analysis is representing and visualizing the data (Creswell, 2013). Again, I utilized the application Dedoose to complete this stage.

As noted, each interview was conducted via Zoom to ensure that there was a recording and a transcript. Throughout the interviews, I also kept a journal of my initial impressions. After each interview, I reviewed the recordings and transcripts. In terms of document analysis, I reviewed each document by uploading it into Dedoose and coding within the actual document. I also kept a journal about each document that I reviewed in Dedoose. Then, I moved onto coding the interview and document data.

Coding

Coding is an important step in the qualitative data analysis process. Saldaña (2016) states that “a code in qualitative inquiry is most often a word or short phrase that symbolically assigns a summative, salient, essence-capturing, and/or evocative attribute for a portion of language-based or visual data” (p. 4). Coding is a process in which a researcher aggregates text into small categories of information, then seeks evidence for the code from different databases being used in a study, and then assigns a label to the code (Creswell, 2013). Throughout this process, I utilized the coding application Dedoose. I also partnered with a fellow doctoral student researcher to review the data and codes that I generated.

For this capstone project, I decided there would be two rounds of coding: first and second cycles of coding (Saldaña, 2016). Merriam (1998) states: “with regard to the first level of coding, each interview, set of field notes, and document needs identifying notations so that you can access them as needed in both the analysis and the write-up of your findings” (p. 164). Within the first cycle of coding, there are several categories or methods of coding that I could choose from. In the first round of coding, I utilized *a priori* coding. *A priori* coding are codes that are largely determined beforehand (Saldaña, 2016). While not all my codes were determined beforehand, many of them were determined because of the way I structured my interview and document protocols, which were in a similar manner to this study's chosen model, the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model. The PTP model has eleven stages, so the protocols were structured alongside the eleven stages, as well as the second research question regarding a culture of assessment.

Additionally, before I began my second round of coding, I reached out to a member of my doctoral committee to review my codes with her. While she determined that my codes were on the right path, she informed me that many of them were surface-level, and that in my next round of coding I needed to dig deeper to assign meaning to them. I was also instructed to reorganize and reanalyze my data from the first round of coding. This helped me before I moved on to my second round of coding.

Second cycle coding is "advanced ways of reorganizing and reanalyzing data coded through first cycle methods" (Saldaña, 2016, p. 234). During the second cycle of coding is when categories of data emerge. At this stage, the first cycle or *a priori* codes are reorganized to develop a smaller and more selective list of broader categories, themes, concepts, or assertions (Saldaña, 2016). At this part of data analysis and coding, I employed pattern coding. Pattern coding helps to develop a meta code, which is a category label that identifies similarly coded data (Saldaña, 2016). Then, following the meta code, subcodes or subthemes emerged from the data that I collected. These codes, categories, and subthemes were in a codebook within the Dedoose application, which is password-protected.

I would be remiss if I did not outline a plan for analyzing and coding my chosen documents. As noted, I used past student surveys as documents to analyze. A list of the documents that I analyzed is in Appendix D. As noted, document analysis is an iterative process that combines both content and thematic analysis (Bowen, 2009). Further, content analysis is the process of organizing information into categories related to the central research questions, whereas thematic analysis is a form of pattern recognition within the data (Bowen, 2009). These analyses can then relate back to codes uncovered throughout interviews. I utilized content analysis for the document portion of my data collection and analysis; here, I organized the information from the documents into categories related to my research questions. These categories related to my first research question inquiring about alignment with the PTP model and my second research question, which inquired about the culture regarding assessment.

Delimitations

This capstone project had several delimitations, which are defined as “the boundaries of research as it is being proposed and include such information as the ‘case’ being investigated and a brief description of its characteristics” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, p. 77). This research study was delimited to one college, the Education School, within a Research 1 university in the mid-Atlantic. Within the Education School, the Admissions and Student Affairs staff (most, but not all) were interviewed as part of this case study. This research should not be generalized to all higher education student affairs staff, or student affairs offices at differing institutions. Those who were interviewed did so on a volunteer basis. Further, there were delimitations within the chosen data collection method of document analysis. Past surveys have been updated and enhanced, and are therefore not standard, or the same, semester by semester. While this is not necessarily negative, it is important to mention how past surveys have been updated as the student affairs office partnered with new staff members, as well as streamlined how students received support resources following assessment completion.

Limitations

This capstone project also had several limitations, which are “factors that may affect the results of the study and that are generally beyond the control of the researcher” (Hancock & Algozzine, 2017, p. 77).

1. This research study was conducted in the 2023-2024 academic year. While the COVID-19 pandemic is considered over, the world, and higher education with it, continues to be affected by the ramifications of the pandemic. Student engagement with various initiatives is lower than previous levels (Schreiber et al., 2021).
2. The Education School's Director of Student Affairs left their position in Summer 2023. She was previously in her role for seven years and was knowledgeable about the office's mission, assessment practices, and student body. Her departure impacted this research study in a variety of ways, notably with the office losing the person who spearheaded their assessment initiatives. Without a director, the office did not have established goals for the 2023-2024 academic year. The former director was included in the interviews as a participant.
3. The Education School hired a new dean in July 2022. This research study was conducted after the new Dean's first year at the school. During her first year at the Education School, the Dean embarked on a "listening tour," in which she met with school stakeholders regarding their roles and responsibilities at the school. This listening tour included student affairs staff. Now that the Education School Dean is heading into her second full year, she could identify and announce specific programs and initiatives that she is interested in investing in.
4. The student affair office's mission statement was established by the former Director of Student Affairs in 2021. The office's mission is: "The Education School Office of Student Affairs guides and empowers students to become their most authentic selves through a community of care and inclusion during their educational journey and beyond" (*Student Affairs*, 2021). With a new dean in 2022, and a new director that arrived in October 2023, this mission, while not amended, has been under scrutiny by a new group of school stakeholders.
5. The PTP model has eleven stages within it; while this study evaluated the Education School student affairs office's alignment with the model, several participants misunderstood stage six of

the model. Stage six is notably the most difficult stage of the model and involves a deeper analysis. A potential limitation of this study was the confusion on stage six of the PTP model.

6. The researcher's positionality was a potential limitation for this research study. Research continues even as researchers reflect, and biases shape the research process (Bourke, 2014). I am a current staff member within the Admissions and Student Affairs Office at the Education School; my role is Assistant Director of Student Affairs. I have been in this role since July 2022. In my work as Assistant Director of Student Affairs, I am familiar with the student survey documents that I analyzed. Additionally, I have an existing rapport with my colleagues in the office; this rapport was noticeable throughout my interviews with participants.

Data Management

All video recordings, transcripts, documents, journals, and the codebook were stored in my institution's Microsoft OneDrive, which is a password-protected cloud-based storage system. Research participants were assigned pseudonyms, and the notes for the respective interviews were kept private. Furthermore, the reflexive research journal that I kept is also kept within the Microsoft OneDrive system. For more information on the data management plan, please see Appendix F.

Chapter Summary

This third chapter outlined the research methodology for this capstone project. The goal of this research study is to evaluate the assessment practices of the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office to see their alignment with the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model. This capstone project also assesses the student affairs' office culture of assessment. As a result of this study, assessment practices of the Admissions and Student Affairs team may improve, thus improving the overall student experience at Education School, and therefore, Research University.

The next chapter will review this study's findings, which stem from document analysis and nine semi-structured interviews with current and past staff of the Education School student affairs office. The findings are organized similarly to the chosen model that guides this study, which is the PTP model. Additionally, findings regarding the culture surrounding assessment in the office are included.

Chapter Four: Study Results

Chapter four presents the findings of this case study, which examines how the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office assessment (student survey) practices align with the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model, and the culture of assessment within the office. The study results are attributed to analysis of coded interviews of eight current staff members- and one past staff member- of the Education School's student affairs office, as well as document analyses of five student surveys and recorded transcripts of two student survey share-out videos. Combining the data from the interviews and document analyses together helps present the robust findings of this capstone project. Below is a table that outlines the interview participants- who are current and past staff members from the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office. The office employs multiple staff members who work across various functional areas within higher education and student affairs.

Participant Pseudonym	**Functional Area**	**Staff Member Status (current or past)**
Bridget	Leads all functional areas	Current
Joan	Admissions	Current
Michael	Admissions	Current
John	Academic Operations	Current
Priya	Student Affairs	Current
Umer	Assessment and Accreditation	Current
Christine	Career Services	Current
Bianca	Academic Operations	Current
Abigail	Student Affairs	Past

Chapter four is organized in a similar manner to the study's chosen model, the PTP model. The chapter will progress through the eleven steps of the PTP model; then, study results regarding the office's culture regarding assessment are included. This capstone's research questions inquire about the PTP model and the culture surrounding assessment within the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office. The research questions are:

1. How do the current assessment practices of the Education School student affairs office align with the PTP model?
2. What is the culture surrounding assessment in the student affairs office?

The figure below refers to the PTP model and its eleven steps:

PRACTICE	THEORY			PRACTICE
PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION	TRANSLATION	PRESCRIPTION	PRACTICE
1. Identify pragmatic concerns 2. Determine educational goals and outcomes	3. Examine which theories may be helpful in this case 4. Analyze student characteristics from perspective of each theory base 5. Analyze environmental characteristics from perspective of each theory base	6. Analyze the sources of developmental challenge and support in the context of both student and environmental characteristics	7. Re-analyze educational goals and outcomes 8. Design learning process that will deliberately facilitate mastery of educational goals	9. Implement educational experience 10. Evaluate goals 11. Reevaluate and, if necessary, refine, redesign, reconceptualize, and amend use to other populations

(Mueller, 2019)

Data from staff interviews and document analyses follow the logic of the eleven steps of the PTP model, as well as the research question inquiring about the culture of assessment present within the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office.

The PTP model is designed to help bridge the gap between theory, research, and practice in student affairs. The model aids student affairs practitioners in outlining actionable steps in their work designing student support initiatives, while also helping to translate theory into practice (Mueller, 2019). As noted, the model has eleven steps and begins and ends with practice. For these reasons, the model can also be viewed as an iterative process. While I included an overview of the PTP model above, here are the eleven steps of the PTP model:

Step One: Identify Pragmatic Concerns

Step Two: Determine Educational Goals/Outcomes

Step Three: Examine Which Theories May be Helpful

Step Four: Analyze Student Characteristics

Step Five: Analyze Environmental Characteristics

Step Six: Translation

Step Seven: Re-analyze Educational Goals and Outcomes

Step Eight: Design a Deliberate Developmental Intervention

Step Nine: Implement Educational Experience

Step Ten: Evaluate the Educational Experience

Step Eleven: Reevaluate, Refine, Redesign, and Reconceptualize

There were findings included within steps one through six, and then eight through eleven. However, between participant interviews and document analyses, there were no findings related to the seventh step of the model.

PTP Step One: Identify Pragmatic Concerns

Step one of Knefelkamp et al.'s PTP model involves identifying pragmatic concerns before designing educational initiatives. By both interviewing eight current (and one previous) Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office staff members, and reviewing pertinent documents related to student surveys, my first interview and document analysis question was related to how staff members may or may not identify concerns as a part of the student survey process. Analyses of documents and interviews indicated that pragmatic concerns arise even before the student surveys are designed or distributed. These concerns ranged from poor attendance, personal issues, mental-health issues, or inter-personal issues with other students or faculty. For example, one Education School student survey stated "this survey is designed to understand your overall well-being as a student in the Education School. We continue to survey students in order to determine immediate needs and to inform the ongoing design of facilitation of support and resources." Other documents reviewed displayed a similar identifying of concerns, and thus, communicated the purpose of the surveys to the students partaking in them.

In my interview with Abigail, the former Director of Student Affairs at the Education School, she mentioned to me that the surveys further helped to identify specific concerns about students. She stated, "we needed to know the specific concerns at each instance and know what resources we could utilize to support those concerns, rather than use one-off stories to [support students]." Here, Abigail indicates that having a sense of student concerns would benefit the student affairs staff who then provide students with resources that they may need to succeed.

One interview participant, Umer from the assessment and accreditation functional area, stated that Education School staff identify concerns before designing student surveys and assessments, through a combination of factors:

> I guess in a lot of cases we have historic sort knowledge of what common issues could be facing students. And so, when we've designed stuff, we're really looking at questions that tap into those common areas. We also provide sort of open-ended space in case there are other issues and are clearly open for additions. If we start seeing a trend we might want to add something new.

Umer's response relates to the first step of the PTP model, which is recognizing that there is a pragmatic concern and then describing the concern. Here, Umer provided context regarding common issues Education School students may be facing. From this interview quote, Umer acknowledged that common issues are known before surveys are designed; he also maintained that survey questions are designed to "tap into," or address, those issues. Additionally, Umer mentioned how student surveys included open-ended questions for other concerns. One example of these open-ended surveys is in one of the Pulse surveys that I analyzed. In that survey, an open-question asked students to let staff members know if they have additional information or feedback on how best to support their mental-health and well-being.

Lastly, Umer's interview quote provided information on how Education School Admissions and Student Affairs staff members address student survey trends. Umer stated that if staff witness a trend within the data, then a new survey question may be added. This is also evident in one of the recorded share outs that I reviewed. In the 2023 Pulse Survey Share Out, staff members stated that a trend they identified was that students were skipping survey questions that asked them to compare their well-being to previous semesters. Staff realized these questions were unnecessary, so then they removed the questions from the survey.

PTP Step Two: Determine Educational Goals/Outcomes

Step two of the PTP model involves determining educational goals or outcomes for a student affairs initiative. Mueller (2019) ascertains that without considering goals and outcomes, there is not a good grasp of what student affairs practitioners want for their students. There are also two types of goals: content and development. Content goals involve the knowledge and facts that student affairs professionals want students to learn as a result of the intervention or initiative; developmental goals are intellectual skills practitioners want students to gain (Mueller, 2019). While the interviews and document analysis for this capstone project primarily involved the goals of student affairs surveys, I would be remiss if I did not mention goals of the Education School student affairs office. As noted in my limitations for this project, the Admissions and Student Affairs Office underwent several personnel changes in 2023. Notably, interview participant Abigail, the former Director of Student Affairs, left her role in July 2023. A new Director of Student Affairs was hired, but she did not begin at the Education School until October 2023. During this time, the office was understaffed and did not establish goals for the 2023-2024 academic year. The dearth of goals thus influenced how student affairs staff participated in and responded to interview questions. Without these goals for the office and academic year, staff could not offer how the goals of student affairs survey were determined.

In this stage of my interviews and document analyses, I examined how goals may be determined within or ahead of Education School student affairs assessments. One student survey, the 2018 Climate and Belonging Survey, detailed the goal of the survey in its opening: "The goal of this survey is to collect information and honest feedback from our students about their sense of belonging and perceptions of the current climate at Education School." From the preceding quote from the first Climate survey, a content goal emerged; staff wanted to learn specific knowledge or facts about students, which would, in turn, impact student support initiatives at the Education School.

Further, other interview participants indicated that goals are established as a part of the survey design process. Priya from the student affairs functional area stated:

> So, I think the goals [of the various student surveys] are to evaluate all of the different factors that might be contributing to students' well-being, so we can continue strengthening those factors, and then look at factors that might be negatively impacting students and figure out ways to mitigate the damages of those factors and help our students feel more supported.

Here, Priya maintains that the goals of student surveys are to evaluate students' well-being. She also ascertained that understanding student well-being allows for staff to strengthen initiatives that positively impact well-being. Then, from understanding student data, staff can remove damaging factors that negatively influence student well-being. This is evident within the various iterations of the Pulse Survey that I reviewed. The 2023 Pulse Survey opened with the statement: “this survey is designed to understand your overall well-being as a student in the Education School.” Additionally, the survey specifically asks students which Education School resources positively contribute to their educational experience.

Furthermore, the Climate and Belonging Survey inquires about students’ well-being and sense of belonging at the Education School. It opens with information about the survey, and how it was designed to collect student feedback about their sense of belonging and the current climate at the school. As Priya noted, data from this survey can help staff to mitigate damaging factors that negatively impact students. Responses to data from this survey include designing a more robust orientation program for new graduate students; building out the orientation program helped to answer many lingering questions students had when they began at the Education School. These questions included graduate school academic requirements and rules, as well as best practices for success in graduate school from current Education School students.

While some participants agreed that goals are identified as a part of the survey design process, others did not. One participant, Bridget, maintained that the goals of student assessments are difficult to establish, because student affairs staff members are not going into the survey or assessment process with “a sort of a priori expectation of anticipated outcomes.” This was the first case of participants disagreeing with the work they do in relation to the stages of the PTP model.

In this stage of the model I asked participants about their involvement with the survey process; I did this because the surveys often opened with outright goals for survey data. Specifically, I inquired how participants are involved with designing, testing, and distributing student affairs surveys. Some participants, such as Joan, Bridget, and Christine, stated that they were not part of the survey process at all, other than reviewing data and responding to student concerns. While they were aware that surveying of students occurred, they could not speak to the specific details of the assessment process. Other participants, like Bianca, and John, knew about the surveys and could only guess how they were designed. A third subset of participants were aware of the survey design process. These participants either worked directly in the student affairs or assessment functional areas and were Michael, Umer, Abigail, and Priya. Because of his role in assessment, Umer described how surveys were designed:

> The way I'm involved is, I guess, developing the questions that we're using to measure students' well-being, services, use and needs for potential supports. And then I guess my role is development, but that's collaborative obviously with the student affairs side of things. I guess all of these things are positive because it's rooted in collaboration.

Here, Umer outlines how he helps develop student surveys, as well as the goals for the surveys. He also indicates how he partnered with student affairs staff to help in the design process; collaboration later emerged as a big theme within the culture of assessment section.

At this stage of my interviews, Abigail explained how, when she was in her Director of Student Affairs role, she saw herself as the "project manager" for Education School student affairs surveys. She offered how she helped with every stage of the survey process, from initial design, to testing surveys before they were distributed to Education School students. She maintained that surveys were tested by multiple stakeholder groups at the Education School, including faculty, staff, and student leaders.

PTP Step Three: Examine Which Theories May Be Helpful in This Case

Stage three of the PTP model occurs as student affairs practitioners begin to identify which student development theories may be relevant to their current initiative (Knefelkamp et al., 1985; Mueller, 2019). At this point in my interviews, I asked participants about the use of student development theories within the student assessments, and how theories may be integrated within student surveys, or staff responses to student surveys. Participants disagreed on this step of the model. Priya stated that her background was not in student affairs, but rather, in general mental health counseling, which limited her knowledge of student development theory. She stated: “I mean, I know that college students are at this unique developmental level where maybe their frontal lobes aren't fully developed.” She went on to state that she did not know specific student development theories, and therefore, could not incorporate them into her work as a student affairs staff member at the Education School.

One participant, Christine, maintained that her use of theory is related to the functional area she works in, which is career services. “Yeah, I think basically my office works with it [student development theory] in terms of I look at it in terms of career development, the career development piece as being an important part obviously, of student development.” Christine then stated that she uses various student development theories to support students in their career development and exploration.

Another interview participant, Abigail, discussed how theory was utilized to design one of the Education School student surveys, the 2017 Climate and Belonging Survey. This survey, meant to evaluate students’ sense of belonging, as well as the climate at the school, was designed with educational psychology and student development theories by practitioners in the field. Abigail, who was a former staff member of the Education School, worked with a team to design the Climate and Belonging survey. She said in her interview that theories related to diversity, equity, and inclusion and student development were utilized to design the survey.

However, while participants ranged in their level of comfort and use of student development theory, few addressed student development theory in the context of student affairs surveys. Multiple participants discussed their implicit use of student development theory, rather than using theory explicitly. Participant Michael, from admissions, stated:

> I’m sure it’s [theory] kind of like integrated without being stated all the time. I think that's the thing about theory, the idea is when you're putting it into practice is that you're not thinking about it as a theory. It's not like, oh, going back to Bronfenbrenner and doing this. It's just this is something we should do.

Here, Michael refers to a student development theorist Urie Bronfenbrenner. In his statement, he maintained that student affairs practitioners often utilize student development theories implicitly; they are not explicitly mentioning student development theorists in their day-to-day work in student affairs. Staff offered that if they were aware of theories, they utilized them, but they did not specifically state these when working with students.

This step of the PTP model caused Education School Admissions and Student Affairs staff members to disagree with each other. Some staff, such as Priya, were unfamiliar with student development theory and could not utilize it to support students. Others, like Christine and Abigail, enthusiastically detailed their use of theory in both designing surveys and supporting students within their functional areas. Many staff members were like interview participant Michael, who relayed his use of theory in an implicit manner, rather than explicitly. Here, staff maintained that their use of theory is informal, but always undergirding their work with Education School students.

PTP Step Four: Analyze Student Characteristics

Stage four of the PTP model involves gathering information about students as they are considered in terms of relevant theories (Mueller, 2019). This step of the interview and document analyses resulted in three subthemes: incorporating student demographic data, acknowledging student personal experiences, and the response rate to student surveys.

Student Demographic Data

Throughout my conversations with Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office staff members, I learned just how important it is to them to incorporate student demographic data into the surveys distributed to students. For example, in the transcript of Pulse Survey Spring 2023 Share Out, staff members shared with school stakeholders results of the Spring 2023 Pulse Survey. During this recorded event, staff reviewed the specific demographics of the students who responded to the survey. This helped to contextualize student concerns through their academic programs, gender, race, or student level (graduate versus undergraduate, online versus on-campus, etc.). Staff also detailed how this demographic data contextualized students within the Education School. Understanding the makeup of the students helped staff to better design support initiatives. For example, because a high number of students who identified as limited-income, first-generation responded to the Pulse Survey that they needed additional support to be successful, student affairs staff began to plan more support events for that population of students. One such support event was a mixer during Research University's "First-Generation Student Celebration Week." First-generation, limited-income students were invited to mix with one another with refreshments, which allowed for students to bond with those from a similar background.

Additionally, when asked about stage four of the PTP model, Umer stated:

> So, in all of our cases, the surveys are built so that we have information about what program they're in, what level in terms of their undergrad or grad…. we know if they're first-gen, we know if they are student-athletes, we know their race and ethnicity as defined by IPEDS, and reported gender.

Here, Umer is detailing how student data is embedded within student surveys, which, due to this data, are confidential and not anonymous. During the interviews, it became evident that staff members utilized demographic data to better support students. Another model of this is student affairs staff further utilizing data regarding first-generation, limited-income Education School students. Data from these students indicated they needed more support applying to graduate school; because of this, the Education School student affairs staff planned an event to pair current first-generation, limited-income graduate students with undergraduate students interested in applying to graduate school. The workshop is now a regular event, hosted yearly, for the student affairs team. By having knowledge of various student identities, staff members indicated that they could further tailor their programmatic responses to the surveys.

Student Personal Experience

Another subtheme that arose within PTP model stage four is acknowledging student personal experiences. This was particularly apparent in the 2022 Climate and Belonging Survey Share Out, which I analyzed as a recorded document. In that survey share out, staff members discussed the disparate experiences of students depending on their academic programs. There, staff members acknowledged how students' survey responses can vary depending on their personal experiences in their academic programs or even their personal lives. A specific example of this is upperclassmen (in particular, students in their senior years at Research University) in the teaching program responding to the Climate and Belonging Survey that they did not feel a sense of belonging. Students in this program are in full-time teaching placements during working hours and could not attend Education School events occurring during the day. Because of this survey data, student affairs staff began offering more programming, like grab and go meals in the evening, to accommodate students in the teaching program who were in placements during business hours.

Later, in the survey share out, staff expressed changes they made to student programming in response to survey data that indicated support around diversity, equity, and inclusion was lacking. One such example of this is how, following the 2021 Climate and Belonging Survey, and subsequent survey share out, the Education School revamped their orientation experiences to incorporate more conversations and resources regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. Since this amendment, staff from the school's Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion have their own session at orientation, which discusses the role of the office at the Education School, as well as offers resources for students interested in diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Student Response Rate

In addition to considering student demographic data and personal experiences, Education School student affairs staff members indicated they utilize student survey response rates throughout the assessment process (designing, revamping, sharing, etc.). Participant John, from academic operations, detailed how the team evaluates student response rates to see where students may be dropping off while completing surveys. John also added that assessing response rates helps practitioners identify what information students are taking from the surveys. He maintained that evaluating student responses rates to various student assessments is an important part of the assessment process.

Identifying how many students respond in the context of the larger school is crucial to designing supportive student programming and responding to student needs. In both student survey share-outs that I reviewed, staff members shared specific percentages of student responses with attendees; this assisted with further assessment planning, as well as how staff members responded to student concerns. An illustration of this is how the student affairs office partnered with an academic department at the Education School with low survey response rates; the academic department chair worked with their faculty to encourage students to respond to the Pulse survey and thus, more data was collected. From this data, department-specific initiatives were planned, such as meals for students in the largest undergraduate major at the Education School.

Furthermore, interview participant Abigail, who was integral to designing Education School student surveys, maintained that low student response rates to surveys had negative implications for students. She stated, “if the survey has a low response rate, it’s going to be hard for us to use the data.” Leaders at the Education School were interested in survey data when there was a higher response rate since they could then generalize the findings to more students. This is another example of the importance of survey response rates for Education School staff members.

PTP Step Five: Analyze Environmental Characteristics

In step five of the PTP model, student affairs practitioners begin to take the overall environment into account. After reviewing Education School student surveys and interviewing student affairs staff members, I learned that the two Education School student affairs assessments this capstone project is evaluating (Pulse and Climate and Belonging surveys) resulted from current or university events. Current and university events both emerged as subthemes within this section.

Current Events

Education School Admissions and Student Affairs staff members indicated to me that their two major student surveys emerged from current events. While the purpose of each of the surveys was different, they both were in response to events with widespread impact, particularly on students. Bridget, the head of the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office, stated:

> I think these [surveys] really stemmed from the external conditions that indicated to us that we needed more information about how to better respond to our students. Yes, there was the geopolitical strife…and that has continued to evolve in terms of exactly what that is, but still concerns that want to make sure that all of our identities of our population are considered when we're thinking about their belonging and inclusiveness.

Here, Bridget highlighted how staff members were aware that external events impact students at the Education School. She also stated that surveys helped to provide more information on how to better respond to students who are affected by these events.

The first iteration of the Pulse Survey, from 2020, is a salient example of how student affairs surveys asked students what they need in relation to current events. When the 2020 Pulse Survey was distributed, the COVID-19 pandemic was still in its relatively early stages. Research University students were not permitted to reside on campus and were experiencing emergency remote learning. As a part of emergency remote learning, students needed access to the internet to complete their coursework, but many students did not have such access. Interview participant Abigail detailed how several students requested funding for an internet hot spot through the 2020 Pulse Survey. Students who requested funding received it from Research University funding resources, which demonstrated the importance of data from the Pulse Survey.

University Events

In addition to current or global events, Education School staff members also maintained how events at the larger university, Research University, impacted or even spurred the development of student surveys. From my analysis of the 2018 Climate and Belonging Survey and subsequent share-out, I learned that that survey was originally designed following white supremacist rallies on the campus of Research University in the summer of 2017. Staff members highlighted how students were negatively impacted by those events. At the time, students faced racist attacks and were stressed and unable to complete their schoolwork, so the original Climate and Belonging Survey was designed by staff in 2017. Former Director of Student Affairs, Abigail, detailed how she utilized survey data from students of color to build out specific supports for those students, such as BIPOC (black, indigenous, and other people of color) safe space events. Furthermore, due to, in part, the data from student responses to the 2018 Climate and Belonging survey, Education School eventually opened an office exclusively dedicated to issues regarding diversity, equity, and inclusion. The office was aptly named the Education School Office of Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and continues to partner with the student affairs office presently.

PTP Step Six: Translation

Stage six of the PTP model is often referred to as the most difficult one for student affairs practitioners (Mueller, 2019). This stage involves a deeper analysis of students and the environment (Knefelkamp et al., 1985; Mueller, 2019). Knefelkamp maintained that many student affairs practitioners mistakenly regard this as the step where theory simply gets translated to practice (Knefelkamp et al., 1985; Mueller, 2019). I found this to be true throughout the interviews and document analyses that I conducted. Few interview participants were able to offer examples of the translation stage. One participant, Bridget, even pushed back on the notion the Education School student affairs surveys progress through the translation phase at all:

> I don't think we're going in with sort of *a priori* expectation of ‘this is our anticipated outcome.’ And so therefore we're looking for evidence to support our claim. I agree in that way. It is not a sort of deductive claim, rather it's inductive and in that what is it that our community, which every time we administer this is a different constellation of people.

There, Bridget disagrees with this stage of the PTP model and how Education School student affairs staff members may or may not be progressing through it when designing and administering student surveys. Another interview participant, Bianca, who works in academic operations, agreed that this phase is a difficult one. In our discussion, she told me considers students and their environments, but often feels conflicted in supporting them, since she is beholden to specific school policies. One instance of this is how Bianca and other colleagues are reviewing “affiliated status” (which is when students are registered as affiliated with the Education School, but not enrolled in classes during a specific semester) to ascertain how students in difficult situations do or not benefit from the status. Further, in my review of documents (five surveys and two survey share-out transcripts), I could not locate evidence of student affairs staff progressing through stage six of the PTP model.

PTP Step Seven: Re-Analyze Educational Goals and Outcomes

Step seven of the PTP model involves student affairs practitioners re-analyzing educational goals and outcomes (Knefelkamp et al., 1985; Mueller, 2019). Within my interviews and document analysis, there were no findings related to this stage of the PTP model.

PTP Step Eight: Design a Deliberate Developmental Intervention

Stage eight of the PTP model occurs when practitioners design. As I noted during the overview of the PTP model, the literature I engaged with utilized the terms learning process and intervention, which deliberately facilitates mastery of educational goals (Knefelkamp et al., 1985; Mueller, 2019). Within my data collection, I utilized the term intervention rather than learning process. Very few of the interview participants provided insight into this stage of the PTP model. In fact, there was consternation among the participants over what a "deliberate developmental intervention" even was. Some participants questioned if it was providing students with specific support resources (see next stage of the PTP model's section for insight on providing students with resources) or reimagining what student affairs programming looks like. The data I collected also did not indicate that staff were designing a learning environment that challenges students to acquire new information or think complexly. Some staff members indicated that stage eight occurs when support events are planned with survey data. Bridget maintained that this stage involves creating new programming, or even allocating other kinds of resources or financial support. One example of this that emerged after survey data was analyzed is the designation of a student emergency fund within the Education School (this is separate from the fund present at Research University). Specifically, on the Pulse survey, students indicated that they needed additional financial support other than federal loans. Because of this data, staff members connected with the Education School Foundation (the fundraising arm of the school) and then reached out to a donor who could provide finances for an emergency fund, which was established in 2022.

Through document analyses, it was evident that students were questioned regarding the educational interventions or processes in which they were interested. Both the Pulse and Climate and Belonging surveys inquired about programming for students, such as orientation, library events with academic resources, or career services events. For example, the 2021 Pulse Survey included "the survey is not anonymous because we will use your responses to inform our build out of programs and initiatives, but your answers will be kept confidential." There, stage eight of the PTP model is highlighted in how deliberate developmental interventions had the potential to be designed based on student survey data. Additionally, the Pulse survey inquired about which resources or events had a positive impact on students' educational journeys. Depending on the students' answers, staff continued to plan these events or utilize the resource. One such resource is a virtual community built within the school's Learning Management System (LMS). On the Pulse Survey, students indicated high usage of the community, and that it was integral to their success. Because of that, student affairs staff members have continued to build out the community and host virtual events there.

PTP Step Nine: Implement Educational Experience

Step nine of the PTP model involves the student affairs practitioner's return to practice. At this stage, implementation of a student affairs policy, program, or intervention occurs (Mueller, 2019). While participants disagreed on stage eight of the model, several could touch on this point in the PTP model. Bridget, the administrator charged with heading the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office, stated that the office's surveys help staff members to continue with the work of running a school and educating students, as well as making sure students are safe and able to be their best selves. Surveys, and thus, staff members' response to survey data, were identified as the educational experience being implemented. An example of an educational experience following survey data analysis is how Educational School student affairs staff members planned affinity-based dinners for students. Climate and Belonging survey student data indicated that students of color felt marginalized at the Education School. Thus, the staff began hosting dinners based on student identities, ordering food from local restaurants whose owners have similar identities. Next, this section's subtheme is providing students with resources.

Providing Students with Resources

Following the administration of various student surveys, Education School student affairs staff members provided students with resources via email. In my analysis of the 2023 Pulse Survey Share Out, the resources shared with students were named. Staff members highlighted how, following analysis of survey data and student responses, they followed up individually with students to email them academic support resources, mental health resources, financial resources, or career services resources. These resources include applications to a central Research University student emergency fund, referrals to Research University counseling services, or referrals to receive academic accommodations from the

Research University student disability center. This relates to the theme of providing students with resources, as the surveys supplied information on what Education School students needed to be successful.

A further example of providing students with resources comes from staff member Christine. Christine, who works in Career Services, stated:

> So, what happens is once the students respond to the survey and that data is collected each semester, I usually do two things. We crafted an email for students who wanted additional career information or knowledge; we crafted a what I say automatic response. Then, I follow up individually with folks to see if they would like a meeting.

Here, Christine's work is twofold. Students automatically receive an email that she wrote with important career services resources. Then, she also individually follows up with students to see what sort of educational experience or meeting is needed.

PTP Steps Ten and Eleven: Evaluate the Educational Experience and Refine and Reconceptualize

In step ten of the PTP model, student affairs practitioners evaluate their educational experience (Knefelkamp et al., 1985; Mueller, 2019). Next, in step eleven, practitioners refine and reconceptualize their educational experience (Knefelkamp et al., 1985; Mueller, 2019). Due to the nature of PTP model stages ten and eleven, I combined these stages when interviewing participants.

For step ten of the PTP model, past Education School student affairs director Abigail provided helpful information on student survey evaluation. In our interview, she discussed how she and other staff members would examine student responses to survey items. According to Abigail, if students were not answering survey questions in a way that made sense, staff members would discuss how best to amend questions for the next round of survey dissemination. This is an example of how surveys were evaluated.

Next is step eleven of the PTP model, which involves refining and reconceptualizing educational experiences. In both interviews and document analyses, refining and reconceptualizing were prevalent.

This was evident in the Climate and Belonging 2022 Survey Share Out. In that recorded document, Education School staff members discussed the previous viability of the survey and how best to edit it to support students during the COVID-19 pandemic. Additionally, in my interviews participants spoke positively about the survey evaluation process. Participant John, from academic operations, noted that, depending on how students responded, survey questions could be refined. His reflection on survey refinement offered me a glimpse into how staff members view the refinement stage of the PTP model. Participant Bridget agreed; she also maintained that Education School student affairs surveys are continually refined based on patterns of student responses. Interview participant Umer also echoed this point.

On the contrary, while participants agreed that survey instruments were continually refined, they were not able to offer how educational experiences designed *because* of survey data were evaluated (PTP step ten) refined or reconceptualized (PTP step eleven). When asked about this, participants indicated that few experiences themselves are evaluated. Before former staff member Abigail departed her role, post-event evaluations or surveys were an initiative she was trying to introduce to the student affairs team. Unfortunately, in interviews, staff members could not offer examples of such post-event evaluations occurring.

Culture of Assessment

The second section of this findings chapter discusses the culture surrounding assessment within the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office. For this portion of my interview protocol, I presented interview participants with the definition of a culture of assessment, which was “an organizational environment in which decisions are based on facts, research, and analysis, and where services are planned and delivered in ways that maximize positive outcomes and impacts for customers and stakeholders” (Lakos & Phipps, 2004, p. 352). Related to the concept of a culture of assessment is the broader definition of organizational culture, which is the amalgam of beliefs, ideology, language, ritual, and myth within an organization (Pettigrew, 1979). Further, organizational culture denotes a continuing social system and the elements of the culture help control the behavior of the staff within it (Masland, 1985; Pettigrew, 1979). I shared these definitions to help contextualize the results from interviews and document analyses. Participants were asked if, based on the above definition of a culture of assessment, they believed if such a culture is prevalent in the office.

When questioned about the culture regarding assessment in the Education School student affairs office, participant Joan, who works in admissions, answered unequivocally that there is a culture of assessment present. Joan maintained that there is a culture of assessment present because of the regular assessment of student services year after year. When I asked about how student services are assessed, Joan stated that individual managers within the office assess services for their individual functional areas. She affirmed for me that decisions regarding student support are indeed based on facts, an important tenet within the definition of a culture of assessment.

Furthermore, from my interview and document analyses, I determined notable themes related to the culture of assessment, which are fatigue, collaboration, and disagreement regarding a culture of assessment. Each of those themes also had specific subthemes emerge, which will be further detailed. Lastly, in other discussions with participants, and document analyses, there were less definitive opinions on the prevalence of a culture of assessment. This chapter will conclude with those comments.

Fatigue

In multiple conversations with participants, the notion of fatiguing students was brought up. Education School student affairs staff members seemed cognizant- and worried- about over-emailing and over-surveying students. In the recorded Spring 2023 Pulse Survey Share Out that I analyzed, staff members specifically stated that they do not want to over survey students; they shared their strategies to avoid doing so. These strategies included limiting survey distribution to the spring and fall semesters for the Pulse survey and limiting survey distribution to every two years for the Climate and Belonging survey. This relates to a culture of assessment because Education School students are surveyed regularly, and staff members are hoping to make decisions based on student survey data in addition to planning services that maximize positive outcomes for students.

Further, former Education School staff member Abigail, from the student affairs functional area, touched on the regularity of student surveys, and the fear of over-surveying students. “People obviously get survey fatigue because they're like, I've already told you this three times and you've done nothing with it.” In this quote, Abigail stressed the importance of ensuring students see survey results in action, another important part of operating within a culture of assessment. While still employed at the Education School, Abigail planned survey share-out events for faculty, staff, and students. She maintained it was important for students, especially, to see school administrators engaging with survey data. Further, when planning events related to student survey data, Abigail branded them with “You spoke- we listened!” so Education School students could witness how their survey data was utilized to plan various support events.

Another current staff member, Michael from admissions, seemed keenly aware of both the number of surveys and emails students receive. “If you don’t have a similar survey out, you just kind of send an email giving people a heads up…but at the same time, I know students are overwhelmed with emails.” Between my conversation with Michael, and my interviews with other staff members, developing different strategies to reach students was at the forefront of most staff members’ minds. One of these strategies included using the Education School’s Learning Management System (LMS) to contact students, rather than sending multiple emails. Staff told me they utilized the virtual community within the LMS to alert students via announcements of important goings-on at the school.

Collaboration

The most common theme that arose within the culture of assessment section was collaboration. Collaboration is important within organizational culture since it helps to further the mission of the organization. Both interview data and document analyses demonstrated the high amount of staff collaboration at the Education School within the various student surveys. The theme of collaboration has four subthemes: pan-Research University collaboration, Education School collaboration, in-office collaboration amongst student affairs staff members and their functional areas, and personnel changes within the office.

Pan-University Collaboration. This capstone project's research site, Education School, is one of twelve schools within Research University. One subtheme that emerged within collaboration is pan-university collaboration. In the Pulse Surveys that I analyzed (Pulse Survey Fall 2020, Spring 2021, and Spring 2023) it was clear that Education School student affairs staff relied heavily on university-wide resources to support students. Some of these resources included emergency funding resources, tutoring services, or referrals for academic accommodations. This relates to the notion of culture of assessment in that Education School staff report out how many referrals they make to students to university-wide resources. Furthermore, student affairs staff participate in university-wide groups. Within these group meetings, student affairs staff from across the university meet to discuss student support issues and trends. At these meetings, Education School student affairs staff members informed me that they advocate for students at their school. When advocating for their students at these meetings, they utilize data from Pulse and Climate and Belonging surveys to demonstrate their understanding of the Education School student experience.

Education School Collaboration. Another subtheme that emerged within this section is collaboration within offices at the Education School. All interview participants spoke enthusiastically about collaborating with their Education School colleagues, regardless of their office. An example of this type of collaboration is the 2021 Climate and Belonging Surveys I analyzed. In this survey, the opening paragraph stated that the survey was jointly designed by the Education Schools student affairs office and Office for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. This connects to a culture of assessment because it demonstrates the importance of the organizational environment that staff operate within, as well as the importance of inter-departmental collaboration.

Another instance of collaboration within the Education School, as related to the culture of assessment, came from my interview with John. John works in academic operations and particularly with the undergraduate student population at the Education School. In his interview, he indicated how he partners with undergraduate program or degree directors. John's partnership with undergraduate program directors helped continue smooth communication between the Admissions and Student Affairs Office and undergraduate programs. This communication allows students to understand specific academic requirements to graduate from the Education School. Further, my conversation with John helped demonstrate that undergraduate students feel supported by the Admissions and Student Affairs Office. He often uses student survey data in his work with undergraduates, as he knows they have specific needs that may be different from those of graduate students.

In-Office and Functional Area Collaboration. As noted, the Education School student affairs office employs staff members across various functional areas. I interviewed staff members from student affairs, admissions, academic operations, assessment, and career services. In these conversations, all staff discussed how they could not do their jobs without assistance from their office colleagues. Further, those involved with student surveys maintained how each functional area was necessary throughout the survey process, from design, to implementation, refinement, and outreach efforts to students. These conversations further reinforced the importance of collaboration amongst student affairs staff members at the Education School.

Participant Michael, who works in admissions, told me how he was a part of the survey process. Michael assists the student affairs team with pulling specific student lists to embed demographic data into the surveys. He helps to ensure that student affairs surveys are confidential, but not anonymous due to student data such as gender, race, academic level, or first-generation status being embedded within surveys. In my conversation with John from academic operations, he and I discussed his role in the conclusion of the survey process, as someone who is pulled in to assist students with academic support resources. Christine from career services agreed that she collaborated towards the end of the survey process when connecting with students who requested career support. Another participant, Joan, who works in admissions, highlighted the collaborative effort amongst student affairs office members. In her interview, Joan indicated to me how collaborative the office is, and how that collaboration is essential to a culture of assessment since decisions are largely data-driven.

Lastly, Umer from the functional area assessment and accreditation stated, “there is a collaboration amongst units and calling on people who are experts in their respective division or functional area.” Additionally, Umer is the employee who works on the student surveys from the technical standpoint. He partners with student affairs staff to review the surveys semesterly; he also pilot tests the surveys with Education School stakeholders, such as faculty, staff, and student leaders. Umer detailed to me the survey design and implementation process when he outlined how surveys are designed in Qualtrics and then distributed to students via a personalized email. Students then receive individual links to fill out the surveys, since their data is embedded in them. He also partnered with staff from the student affairs functional area to assist with data analysis from student surveys; he would do a first-round analysis of data before passing data to colleagues from student affairs. In his interview, Umer detailed the importance of collaboration amongst units and how, without collaboration, Education School student surveys would not be possible. These points from participants all helped to highlight how important collaboration is within a culture of assessment.

Personnel Changes. Another subtheme within collaboration that emerged throughout my interviews and document analyses was the personnel changes that the Education School had undergone before I began my capstone project. The school brought on a new dean in July of 2022. Then, in the summer of 2023, the Director of Student Affairs (participant Abigail) who was responsible for developing the student surveys that this capstone project evaluates, departed her role. A new Director of Student Affairs was hired in October 2023; this person was new to both the Education School and Research University. Amid these changes, the Education School student affairs office also hired more individuals in student affairs, academic operations, admissions, and assessment; all functional areas were impacted. John, from academic operations, discussed the growth of the office:

> The growth we've had has been amazing. I am loving that. I am so excited that we are just like built-out staff wise with the expertise we need. And I think because how could we talk about assessment when I don't even have the people to do the things I need?

In the above quote, John detailed his excitement regarding the building out of the Admissions and Student Affairs Office. Hiring more staff members, with more expertise, positively influences the student experience, since there are more staff members supporting students. According to John, hiring more staff helped strengthen the student assessments and other practices from the office.

The documents I reviewed also detailed the enthusiasm for the Education School personnel changes. The recorded Climate and Belonging Share Out from 2022 mentioned the hiring of a new dean, and the new energy that the dean would bring with them. The Pulse Survey Spring 2023 Share-Out also detailed the personnel changes. It was at this event where the former Director of Student Affairs, interview participant Abigail, announced her departure from the school. In the recorded survey share-out, Abigail stated how she was preparing the office and student surveys, for her departure by assembling a list of recommendations and changes for whoever would assume the role of Director of Student Affairs.

The subtheme personnel changes relates to collaboration, largely because with more staff, their time and efforts to conduct and improve student surveys increased. All interview participants indicated excitement for the changes and hirings that were made. With more staff came the possibility of dedicating time and resources to supporting students' post survey distribution and analysis. Former staff member Abigail stated, “I think having more staff to purely do the work makes a huge difference because you have different expertise and different professional backgrounds and education levels that are at the table.”

Disagreement About Culture of Assessment

While multiple themes emerged throughout my interviews and document analyses, the last theme that arose was participants’ disagreement on the culture surrounding assessment. When asked, some participants (such as Joan and Bridget) stated unequivocally that there was a culture of assessment within the office. Other participants, such as Priya from student affairs, shared that there was room for growth regarding the culture of assessment. Multiple participants indicated that, while there was an intention to have a culture of assessment, the office had not yet achieved that.

One idea that arose in my interviews was that of competing priorities. Multiple participants stated that while the office was really trying to operate within a culture of assessment, there were multiple priorities in competition in one another. Umer maintained in his interview that while the student affairs office has good intentions for students in mind, not all offices at the Education School are student facing, and thus, might not have students in mind when planning initiatives. This was a common thread throughout my interviews; several participants brought up changing (often, lower) higher education budgets and the impact they have on planning and assessing initiatives.

In addition to competing priorities is the idea of outside influence on the student affairs office. Bianca, from academic operations, ascertained that if assessments (and a culture of assessment) is not a top-down objective from leadership, or in the strategic plan of the institution or school, then it is hard to implement a culture of assessment. John, also from academic operations, agreed with that opinion. He told me that leadership should model the kind of culture they seek from their employees, and that many times, a culture of assessment was not modeled within the Education School as a whole.

Interview participant Bianca made a strong statement on whether the Education School office of student affairs operates within a culture of assessment. She stated:

> And so, I would say, no, we do not drive our decisions based on entirely on facts, research and analysis. As much as we or I would I do say we try, but I think that at the end of the day we are beholden to exterior pushes and pulls that are, you know, seemingly out of our control. And a lot of our decisions are results of that.

When I asked Bianca more about this, she informed me that she is also a doctoral student within higher education, and because of that, may have a unique view on the matter because she studies academic capitalism, and how universities make decisions to be more fiscally responsible. However, multiple participants held the same viewpoints about the culture of assessment within the office. Priya stated that while she believes the office is trying their best to operate within a culture of assessment, there is a struggle with what would maximize the most positive outcomes (in terms of the culture). I further asked about what needs to grow, and she said that growth will occur from determining what students and/or stakeholders want and need. Then, Education School Admissions and Student Affairs staff members could produce outcomes from there.

Lastly, participant Abigail acknowledged the positive moves that the office was making towards establishing a culture of assessment. She departed her student affairs role in the summer of 2023 and in her interview, she stated:

> I would say we were moving towards this when I left. I felt early on that I would still face barriers; I do think it was moving towards that culture of assessment, like it felt more special and that we were reporting in a way that was appreciated by faculty and valued.

Abigail was also the final interview I conducted with Education School student affairs staff members, and her similar response to other staff members was helpful, especially with her agreement with other participants on this point.

In some of my interviews, I asked participants how a culture of assessment could be created within the Education School student affairs office. As a reminder, Trice and Beyer (1993) state “creating a culture involves bringing a culture into existence that did not exist before. It entails innovation and although some parts of the culture may not be new, they are configured distinctively” (p. 414). Through linking data with various outcomes, student affairs practices can be improved and adjusted. When asked how to create a culture of assessment, participants offered various ideas; these ideas included regular planning meetings for student surveys, evaluating student programming initiatives, and formalizing collaboration amongst student affairs functional areas. I will discuss these ideas more formally in the recommendations section of chapter five.

Summary of Results

Within this chapter, I summarized the results of this case study to flow with the steps of the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model, as well as my research question regarding the culture of assessment within the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office. This both helped to organize my questions for participants and documents, and then organize the data that I collected. Participants and documents offered information on various stages of the office’s alignment with the PTP model. PTP model stages one and two included brief remarks on how concerns and goals are identified before student surveys are distributed. Within stage three, participants indicated that student development theory is implicitly called upon, rather than explicitly.

Stage four of the PTP model contained three subthemes that the data lent itself to: the importance of including student demographic data, student personal experiences, and how student response rates inform survey follow-up. Next, stage five provided me with two subthemes, which were how both current and university events impact student affairs assessments. There was difficulty throughout stage six- participants and documents relayed little information about this stage. Step seven had no data to indicate staff were in alignment with this part of the model, while stage eight indicated that some student surveys inquired about developmental interventions for students. PTP stage nine displayed the importance of providing students with resources for their success. Lastly, steps ten and eleven of the PTP model showed how important evaluation and refinement are to the student affairs staff members.

Next, the culture surrounding assessment in the office was discussed in my interviews; I also analyzed documents to see what the culture surrounding assessment is in the Education School student affairs office. While some staff strongly believed the office operates within a culture of assessment, some were not so sure, and they offered several reasons as to why. These reasons included outside influences and buy-in from school leadership. During the staff interviews, we also discussed how best to create a culture of assessment within the office. The next chapter, chapter five, will be a discussion of the case study results and answers to this case study’s two research questions. In addition, chapter five will have recommendations for the research site to amend student assessments and their alignment with the PTP model. There are also recommendations regarding the culture of assessment at the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office, and considerations for future research.

Chapter Five: Discussion

Chapter four included the results from this qualitative case study on the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office's alignment with the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model. The case study also evaluated the culture regarding assessment within the office. In chapter four, I organized my findings in a comparable manner to the PTP model's eleven total stages. I also presented results within the scope of the definition of a culture of assessment and to see whether a culture of assessment was prevalent within the student affairs office. In this final chapter, I will discuss these results and answer this study's two research questions.

1. How do the current assessment practices of the Education School student affairs office align with the PTP model?
2. What is the culture surrounding assessment in the student affairs office?

Finally, this chapter will conclude with recommendations for the student affairs office to consider, as well as considerations for future research.

Research Question One: PTP Model

How do the current assessment practices of the Education School student affairs office align with the PTP model?

Throughout chapter four, I included results from an analysis of documents (five student surveys and two recorded student survey share-outs) and interviews with Education School student affairs staff members. From this data, I determined how the Education School may be in alignment with the PTP model. As noted, the PTP model contains eleven stages for student affairs practitioners to progress through when designing educational initiatives. Many student affairs practitioners also consider the PTP model iterative, as it both begins and ends with practice. For this chapter, I will separate the PTP model into three sections: practice, theory, and practice again. The first practice section includes steps one and two. The theory section is a larger chunk, which holds steps three through eight. The third section, practice, includes steps nine through eleven of the PTP model. I will include an image outlining this below:

PRACTICE	THEORY			PRACTICE
PRACTICE	DESCRIPTION	TRANSLATION	PRESCRIPTION	PRACTICE
1. Identify pragmatic concerns 2. Determine educational goals and outcomes	3. Examine which theories may be helpful in this case 4. Analyze student characteristics from perspective of each theory base 5. Analyze environmental characteristics from perspective of each theory base	6. Analyze the sources of developmental challenge and support in the context of both student and environmental characteristics	7. Re-analyze educational goals and outcomes 8. Design learning process that will deliberately facilitate mastery of educational goals	9. Implement educational experience 10. Evaluate goals 11. Reevaluate and, if necessary, refine, redesign, reconceptualize, and amend use to other populations

(Mueller, 2019)

Section One: Practice

Part one of the PTP model includes steps one and two, which are identify pragmatic concerns and determine educational goals and outcomes. When asked, staff members described how pragmatic concerns are identified ahead of the student survey design process. For the Education School student affairs office, student concerns ranged from poor attendance, personal issues, mental-health issues, or inter-personal issues with other students or faculty. Staff detailed how these concerns can be historic or known before surveys are designed and distributed. These concerns often arrive to the office via email, faculty interactions, or self-disclosed by students. Interview data also indicated that surveys are designed to tap into current concerns that Education School students may be facing.

Part two of the PTP model occurs as student affairs staff potentially identify educational goals and outcomes. Interestingly, the Education School student affairs office lacked goals for the 2023-2024 academic year. While some of the documents I reviewed outlined educational outcomes related to surveys, staff disagreed on this stage of the model. Several of the Education School's student surveys specifically outline goals in their opening paragraphs. However, in my interviews with staff, there was not a consensus on how, or if, educational goals of surveys are established. Some staff members indicated to me that goals are certainly determined ahead of time for student surveys. Other staff, such as Bridget, who heads the Admissions and Student Affairs Office, maintained that there are not *a priori* outcomes regarding student surveys. It was interesting to view the differences among responses at this early stage of the PTP model. Staff that were more involved with student surveys could identify educational goals, while those who had less involvement were unable to. Because the student affairs office lacked goals to guide their work in 2023-2024, I think the issues staff had with potentially identifying goals for student assessments makes sense. For these reasons, I could determine alignment with stage one of the PTP model, but not with stage two of it.

Section Two: Theory

Section two of the PTP model involves putting theory into practice. Knefelkamp, the main architect of the PTP model, claimed that theory takes practitioners outside of themselves to observe others and to ask questions (1984). Further, theory can also help to describe and explain (Mueller, 2019; Hubbard, 2018; Jones & Abes, 2017; Killam & Degges-White, 2017; McEwen, 2003; Strayhorn, 2016). Within the theory section of the PTP model, there are six steps, which are:

Step Three: Examine Which Theories May be Helpful

Step Four: Analyze Student Characteristics

Step Five: Analyze Environmental Characteristics

Step Six: Translation

Step Seven: Re-analyze Educational Goals and Outcomes

Step Eight: Design a Deliberate Developmental Intervention

Within the theory section of the PTP model, I was unable to conclude that the office fully implements step three, which examines and integrates student development theory into student affairs initiatives. Few student surveys or survey share-outs that I reviewed addressed the use of student development theory. I only determined that the Climate survey was built with specific student development theories in mind because Abigail mentioned it during her interview. Further, in my interviews, participants ranged in their comfort with and use of theory. Some interview participants did not utilize student development theory at all, while some specifically detailed how they used it in their everyday work, but not specifically with the student survey process. A third subset of participants indicated to me that their use of student development theory was implicit, rather than explicit. When I pushed more on this and asked what they meant by that, these participants said they could not specifically recall a theory or theorist in their work, but that theory did undergird how they operated within their functional area in the student affairs office. For these reasons, alignment on step three of the PTP model remains undetermined.

My interviews and document analyses related to steps four and five of the PTP model resulted in an answer to the overarching research question inquiring about alignment. Step four of the PTP model involves analyzing student characteristics, while step five occurs when environmental characteristics are analyzed (Mueller, 2019). Both document analyses and interviews suggested there was alignment with these steps. Within step four, staff members indicated to me in their interviews that student data is heavily accounted for and utilized within both survey design and survey data analysis. Recorded survey share-out events supported this claim, as staff members reviewed how the integration of student data when planning various student support initiatives.

Further, I noticed strong alignment with stage five of the PTP model. Both document analyses and interviews demonstrated how environmental characteristics impacted the assessment practices of the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office. In their interviews, participants detailed how both student surveys that this capstone project evaluates resulted from current events that negatively impacted students in their educational experiences at the Education School (and Research University). Additionally, surveys inquired about specific resources that students needed to be successful during these difficult current events. Stage five of the PTP model was one of the stronger alignments present.

Throughout my interviews and document analyses, I could not ascertain alignment with steps six and seven of the PTP model. Step six of the model is notably called “translation” and occurs when practitioners engage in a deeper analysis of students and the environment (Knefelkamp et al., 1985; Mueller, 2019). No documents demonstrated alignment with this step. My interviews with student affairs staff members proved that staff were vexed by this stage; few participants could offer examples of the translation stage occurring. One participant even pushed back on this stage and stated that translation does not occur at all. For step seven of the PTP model, which is when educational goals and outcomes are re-analyzed, there was no data. For these reasons, I determined that Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office staff are not aligned with stages six and seven of the PTP model.

The last stage within the middle theory section of the PTP model is step eight, which is when a deliberate developmental intervention or initiative is designed as a manifestation of the learning environment (Mueller, 2019). Additionally, in this stage, the goal is to design a learning environment that challenges students to acquire new information, take on new roles, attempt new skills, think more complexly, and experience themselves with greater insights (Mueller, 2019). Through my document analyses, I learned that Education School students are asked about which types of support interventions they are interested in. However, in my interviews with participants, there was disagreement over what these interventions even are. Some participants maintained that there are events designed with student survey data; some argued that deliberate developmental interventions occur when resources are sent to students. Data from staff interviews and document analysis also did not contribute to the idea that a new learning environment is being designed at this stage of the PTP model. Due to these conflicting responses, I could not determine alignment with step eight of the PTP model. I believe this is also related to the lack of goals guiding the office throughout the 2023-2024 academic year.

Section Three: Practice

Section three of the PTP model signifies a return to practice. This section contains the final three stages of the PTP model- which are steps nine, ten, and eleven. Step nine occurs when student affairs practitioners implement an educational experience; this can be an intervention, program, work, or policy (Mueller, 2019; Knefelkamp et al. 1984, 1985). From interviews and document analyses, I determined that there is alignment with step nine of the PTP model, even though staff struggled with stage eight of the model and were not able detail how an intervention was designed follow survey dissemination in the previous stage. Within step nine, Education School staff members outlined several events or programs that resulted from student survey data. Some of these events included affinity dinners or following up post-survey(s) with specific resources for students. One question that was raised for me is the disconnect I found between steps eight and nine of the model; since participants had trouble articulating how they designed interventions, but then detailed interventions that then completed, I could not help but wonder if these interventions would have occurred with or without this survey data.

During my interviews and document analysis, it made sense to combine steps ten and eleven of the PTP model. In step ten of the PTP model, student affairs practitioners evaluate their educational experience (Knefelkamp et al., 1985; Mueller, 2019). Next, in step eleven, practitioners refine and reconceptualize their educational experience (Knefelkamp et al., 1985; Mueller, 2019). There was some disagreement among staff members about these final stages of the PTP model. In step ten, the educational experience designed is evaluated. Staff members could demonstrate that surveys are evaluated before they were distributed to students; these evaluations occurred through survey planning meetings with specific Admissions and Student Affairs Office stakeholders (but not all staff were involved in these meetings). In these meetings, I learned that survey questions were reviewed, and staff decided which to keep and which to remove. Staff also reviewed the previous survey's response rate, along with plans to maintain or improve the response rate. Additionally, staff planned survey pilot tests with other staff, faculty, or student leaders. In these meetings, staff would also plan the specific timing in the semester for survey dissemination. However, student affairs staff could not offer how their events planned with survey data were evaluated. Step eleven of the PTP model is similar. Staff members could detail survey refinement and reconceptualization (again, occurring in survey planning meetings), but they could not do the same for initiatives or events planned with survey data. For these reasons, I could not determine alignment with PTP model steps ten and eleven.

Overall, through this capstone project I could not determine full alignment between the Education School's assessment practices with the eleven stages of the PTP model. Some steps of the PTP model are present within the practices Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office, such as steps one, four, five, and nine. However, from the data that I collected and analyzed, I could not determine alignment with steps two, three, six, seven, eight, ten, and eleven of the PTP model. Of the preceding steps that did not have full alignment, some had partial alignment based on data from interviews or document analyses. These steps with partial PTP alignment were three and ten. The next section of this chapter addresses my second research question regarding the culture of assessment within the student affairs office.

Research Question Two

What is the culture surrounding assessment in the student affairs office?

For the second portion of my interviews and document analyses, I examined the culture of assessment within the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office. I utilized the following definition of a culture of assessment to guide me during this part of my data collection and analysis, which was "an organizational environment in which decisions are based on facts, research, and analysis, and where services are planned and delivered in ways that maximize positive outcomes and impacts for customers and stakeholders" (Lakos & Phipps, 2004, p. 352). This definition guided me as I examined the documents for this capstone. The surveys I reviewed- three Pulse surveys and two Climate and Belonging Surveys- stated their purposes in the opening paragraphs. One Climate and Belonging Survey even stated:

> The data collected will be used to consider current and future initiatives and programs. This survey will run every other year, and it will serve to inform a data set that will map changes in student experience and climate. Your feedback will be essential as we work to provide meaningful opportunities for students to engage and build on our sense of community at [the Education School].

In the above excerpt from a survey, the specific goal and planned use of student survey data was detailed to students as they began the survey. This helped contribute to a culture of assessment within the office, as students were made aware that decisions from the student affairs office would be grounded by their survey data.

Further, the survey share-outs that I analyzed helped contribute to a culture of assessment within the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office. In these events, Education School staff members would share data from student surveys. Faculty and staff from the Education School were invited to attend these survey share-outs. In the share-outs, staff detailed the changes they planned to make to programming and student support that were grounded in the student survey data. However, while I did see a culture of assessment within these survey share-outs, it was not clear to me if there were share-outs planned for every dissemination of a student survey at the Education School. The two share-outs that I reviewed helped to contribute to a culture of assessment, but it is still unclear to me if these share-outs are regular occurrences.

In my interviews with staff, I presented the culture of assessment definition to them and asked if they thought if such a culture was prevalent within the Admissions and Student Affairs Office. The table below has an overview of staff member responses, along with their functional area and employment status within the office:

Participant Pseudonym	**Functional Area**	**Staff Member Status (current or past)**	**Is there a culture of assessment present?**
Bridget	Leads all functional areas	Current	Yes
Joan	Admissions	Current	Yes
Michael	Admissions	Current	Maybe
John	Academic Operations	Current	No
Priya	Student Affairs	Current	No
Umer	Assessment and Accreditation	Current	Maybe
Christine	Career Services	Current	Yes
Bianca	Academic Operations	Current	No
Abigail	Student Affairs	Past	Maybe

Throughout my nine interviews with current and past staff members in the office, staff disagreed on the status of the culture of assessment within the office. Some staff, such as Bridget, Joan, and Christine, stated unequivocally that a culture of assessment was present since the office makes data-driven decisions to support students and to help keep the school running. A second subset of staff, John, Priya, and Bianca stated that there was not a culture of assessment within the office. When I inquired more about this, they offered several reasons for why such a culture is not present. They maintained that outside influences on higher education negatively impact the culture of assessment because priorities within the school can change due to these influences. They also stated that if leadership at the Education School did not model behavior related to a culture of assessment, then mid-level or lower-level staff did not have positive examples for how best to operate within such a culture. Lastly, there was a third subsection of staff who were torn on whether there was a culture of assessment within the office. Michael, Umer, and Abigail all indicated to me that there was a partial culture of assessment, or that the office was working towards this culture but had not yet achieved it. One of the participants, Umer, said that while the office is working towards a culture of assessment, staff need to be better at setting goals regarding assessment and data at the beginning of the academic year. Then, the goals can help establish a through-line for programming and assessments as the year progresses. Throughout my conversations with participants, I noticed that the Admissions and Student Affairs Office lacked overarching goals for the 2023-2024 academic year.

Examining interview and document analysis results led me to further reflect on the culture present within the office. While there was not a definitive answer regarding the culture of assessment across the Admissions and Student Affairs staff, there were three even subsections between the answers of yes, no, and maybe. It was interesting to see the differing opinions of staff, and particularly of staff members who worked on the surveys more regularly such as Umer and Abigail. Within my interviews, the breakdown of responses regarding the culture of assessment was in interesting contrast to the survey share-outs that I reviewed. These survey share-outs demonstrated such a culture was prevalent. However, the interviews did not lead to that conclusion.

Between document analyses and interviews, I learned a lot about the culture surrounding assessment within the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office. From the surveys and survey share-outs I reviewed, I determined that the Education School does utilize data to make decisions about designing student support initiatives. The semesterly Pulse Surveys indicated to me that student affairs staff members were indeed "keeping a pulse" on their students, their needs, and their wellbeing. The Climate and Belonging Surveys helped demonstrate how students' sense of belonging impacted their experiences at the Education School. These surveys, and their subsequent share-outs, contribute to a culture of assessment at the school. However, interviews with Admissions and Student Affairs staff members were less definitive on this topic. Some staff members truly believed that they operated within a culture of assessment, while others did not. Other staff said the school was heading in the direction of a culture of assessment, but that there was a lot of work to do to achieve such a culture. From this data, I ascertained that the culture regarding assessment is complicated. There is a developing culture of assessment within the office, but based on participant interviews and data from documents, it is not ideal at this moment in time. Again, staff who were more familiar with the school's survey practices agreed that the office is heading towards a culture of assessment, or that there "maybe" was one. Further, staff do utilize data to make student support decisions, but there is a long road ahead of them to improve on these practices and further solidify a culture of assessment within the office. The next section of this chapter offers five recommendations for the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office to adopt to help alignment with the PTP model and improve the office's culture of assessment.

Recommendations

Reviewing the findings from this study, and answering this study's research questions, helped me determine six recommendations for student affairs practitioners at the Education School. These recommendations for the Education School student affairs staff will help them create further alignment with the PTP model, as well as help to solidify a culture of assessment within the office. The recommendations are undergirded in literature that I reviewed for this case study.

Additionally, these recommendations will help to further cement the importance and significance of this case study. As noted, the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office supports future teachers, clinicians, therapists, and educators within the Education School. These recommendations can improve the assessment practices, and thus, student experience at the Education School. If these students feel adequately supported, they graduate from the Education School and hopefully go on to successful helping careers (Pascarella & Terenzini, 1991; Pascarella & Terenzini, 2005). Lastly, with the growing focus on higher education assessment, improving assessment practices in the Education School student affairs office would assist with accountability within student affairs, which then demonstrates the importance of the student affairs field in a time where higher education and student affairs budgets are consistently questioned.

Recommendation One: Amend Office Mission Statement to Reflect Data-Driven Nature of the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office

The Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office has experienced various personnel changes over the past few years. Notably, the former director, interview participant Abigail, departed her role in the summer of 2023. Before departing from her role, Abigail was Director of Student Affairs for seven years. In her role, she developed the current student affairs office mission statement, which is: "The Education School Office of Student Affairs guides and empowers students to become their most authentic selves through a community of care and inclusion during their educational journey and beyond" (*Student Affairs*, 2021). Furthermore, findings from interviews and document analyses demonstrated that few Education School student affairs staff members were aware of, or utilized, student development theory in their everyday work or student surveys. The first part of this recommendation is to introduce student development theory to the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office, as theory guides the work of student affairs practitioners.

Further, a review of extant literature regarding organizational culture within higher education demonstrates the importance of culture within an institution. Organizational culture exists through staff's interpretation of historic and symbolic forms (Tierney, 1988). From this case study, I determined that staff do attempt to operate within a culture of assessment. However, this culture has not been adopted widely within the Admissions and Student Affairs Office, because there was data that showed there was disagreement over PTP alignment as well as the culture regarding assessment. Because of this, the second piece of this recommendation is to update the current mission statement of the office. Revising the mission statement is an example of creating and/or revising a new culture within the organization. Creating an effective assessment culture (and thus, alignment with the PTP model) requires staff to agree on a common definition of assessment as well determine as clear expression of assessment expectations and the use of assessment results (Bresciani, 2005).

Before amending the mission statement, staff from the Admissions and Student Affairs Office must come together and agree on the organizational change they wish to make. Alvesson and Sveningsson (2015) outline a typical plan for creating cultural change:

Step 1: Evaluating the situation of the organization and determining the goals and strategic direction.

Step 2: Analyzing the existing culture and sketching a desired culture.

Step 3: Analyzing the gap between what exists and what is desired.

Step 4: Developing a plan for developing the culture.

Step 5: Implementing the plan.

Step 6: Evaluating the changes and new efforts to go further and/or engaging in measures to sustain the cultural change.

This first recommendation is for current staff members to meet and work through the six steps of creating organizational change. This can be done through a series of organizational change meetings organized by interview participant Bridget, the leader of the office. In these meetings, staff should both analyze existing culture and outline their desired culture; the desired culture is one that fully adopts assessment and student development theory. Jones and Abes (2017) maintain that “theories have long served and equipped the student affairs profession” (p. 150).

Another viewpoint for scaling and creating organization change is from Kezar; Kezar (2021) presents three specific strategies for enacting change at an organization. The first strategy involves creating opportunities for stakeholders to deliberate and have a dialogue. Within this dialogue, norms and values can change, and people accept new ways of operating (Kezar, 2021; Senge, 1990). The next strategy to scale change is to create, or connect with, networks with similar ideas (Kezar, 2021; Bryk, Gomez, and Grunow, 2011). The third strategy to scale change is providing mechanisms of support. These supports “might take the form of concept papers, frameworks, funding, awards, and recognition necessary to help sustain change agents in the face of entropy and even negative dynamics (Kezar, 2021, p. 37; Kezar, 2011). To enact and scale change, Education School student affairs staff could build these strategies into their staff meetings. They could also connect with other organizations or office with similar missions, or who do comparable work.

Once staff members have gone through the steps of creating change or utilized Kezar’s three strategies for scaling change, I believe they will be ready to amend the mission statement to the desired data-driven nature of the office. Student development theory could serve as a guide for this process, as theory provides the foundation for student affairs practice (Jones & Abes, 2017). A potential new mission statement for the office could be “The Education School Office of Student Affairs guides and empowers students to become their most authentic selves through use of student development theory, data-driven decisions, a dedication to diversity, and a community of care and inclusion.”

Recommendation Two: Plan Workshops for Staff to Understand the PTP Model and Offer Examples of Other Use Cases

This case study evaluated the Education School's alignment with the PTP model. Findings suggested that while the office is in alignment with some stages of the model, there a lack of alignment with other stages. Because of this, my second recommendation is for Education School student affairs staff members to attend and participate in a series of three workshops where they are introduced to the PTP model, learn about the model and uses of it in similar office settings, and then create a plan for PTP model adoption within the office. Learning about, and adopting the model, will assist the office in creating and maintaining alignment with the eleven stages of the PTP model. These three workshops should occur yearly to help address any personnel changes within the office, as well as refresh remaining staff members on the PTP model.

Part one of this recommendation involves planning a workshop in which Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office staff are introduced to the PTP model. Mueller (2019) published a monograph about the PTP model through ACPA-College Student Educators International. I recommend that the first workshop for the Education School student affairs office be an overview of the PTP model; this overview should utilize the monograph published by Mueller in 2019. In his literature about the PTP model, Mueller states "it is my hope that I honor Lee Knefelkamp's extraordinary work as I re-introduce the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice model to the next generation of student affairs practitioners" (Mueller, 2019, p. 3). Further, in this first workshop, staff could also be introduced to salient student development theories for their work. Findings from my data collection indicated that some staff are unfamiliar with various student development theories, and thus, did not utilize them in their work. This resulted in a lack of alignment with stage three of the PTP model. Infusing theory into this workshop would be helpful in providing a "common language" for those working with college students (Knefelkamp, 1982; Jones & Abes, 2017). A workshop with Education School staff members is an excellent way to both introduce the PTP model and provide information (or a refresher) on student development theory, as well as the application of student development theory. Such a workshop could then positively influence current and future student affairs practitioners.

The next step of this recommendation is planning a second workshop to provide an overview of PTP model usage in similar organizational settings. Oxendine and Tau (2023) maintain that the PTP model provides a systematic and detailed approach to the application of student development theory to student affairs practice. A few, but not many, organizations have utilized the PTP model for their student support programming. One example of PTP model usage is in literature describing theory to practice when planning orientation services for students. Rode and Cawthon utilized the PTP model in their chapter titled "Theoretical Perspectives on Orientation" within the book *Designing Successful Transitions: A Guide for Orienting Students to College*. In their use of the model, Rode and Cawthon provided justification for utilizing theory in designing orientation programs for new college students; the PTP model was a salient way to utilize theory in this case (Rode & Cawthon, 2010). This is also relevant as the Education School student affairs office plans multiple orientation programs per year, so this use case could be of particular interest to them.

The third piece of this recommendation is to plan a third, culminating workshop for staff members to plan for adoption of the PTP model. At this third workshop, I recommend staff members choose one initiative that their office typically plans. Then, they can plan all facets of this initiative using the PTP model, as well as select which student development theory to utilize when planning the initiative. Below, I will provide an example of an editable page for staff to utilize in this workshop. I propose that staff utilize this page in their third workshop regarding the PTP model. This page is adapted from Mueller's 2019 monograph regarding the PTP model.

PTP Model Step	**Description of the Step**	**Education School Step**	**Notes**

1. Identify Pragmatic Concerns	Define and describe concern including history and context.		
2. Determine Educational Goals	In response to concerns, develop educational goals.		
3. Examine Which Theories Are Helpful	Consider developmental theories that may be most helpful.		
4. Analyze Student Characteristics in the Context of Theory	Utilize student data.		
5. Analyze Environmental Characteristics in the Context of Theory	Utilize environmental data.		
6. Translate	Use insights gained from deeper analysis to what is overly challenging and overly supportive.		
7. Re-analyze Educational Goals	Reconsider educational goals from deeper analysis.		
8. Design	Design the learning environment.		
9. Implement	Take action on the intervention designed in step 8.		
10. Evaluate	Use best practices of assessment to measure degree to which intervention has accomplished goals.		
11. Refine, Re-evaluate, Re-conceptualize	Use information from step 10 to make decisions about the intervention and then consider how practice can be informed in the future.		

In this culminating workshop, Education School student affairs staff members can receive the above chart and update it with their own ideas for planned educational interventions or initiatives. Then, they can move forward from the workshop to adopt student development theory and the PTP model when designing, planning, and refining an educational initiative for Education School students. As noted, this recommendation proposes that these series of workshops occur yearly for student affairs staff members. These yearly workshops will help with inevitable personnel changes in the office, along with providing a review of the PTP model. Yearly workshops will also assist with maintaining alignment with the model's eleven stages.

Recommendation Three: Adopt Kirkpatrick Model of Evaluation

While the crux of this capstone project involves the salience of the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model, there are a variety of evaluation models for student affairs practitioners to adopt. Additionally, I noted throughout this capstone project the difficulty I had locating literature about and evidence of the PTP model and its uses in modern student affairs organizations. While I appreciate the eleven stages of the model, as well as its iterative nature, other models of evaluation could undergird the Education School's student affairs surveys. One such model of evaluation is the Kirkpatrick model; originally introduced in 1959, the Kirkpatrick model involves four major phases of evaluation: reaction, learning, behavior, and results.

The first phase of the Kirkpatrick model, reaction, involves stakeholder's reaction to the learning experience (Kirkpatrick, 1976). At this stage, participants (in this case, students) respond about how engaging and relevant they found the educational experience. The next stage of this model is learning (Kirkpatrick, 1976). At this stage, how much information was absorbed by participants is evaluated, along with how the learning is related to the original learning objectives (Kirkpatrick, 1976). Next is the behavior phase of the model. At this phase, how much the initiative has influenced the behavior of participants of stakeholders is measured (Kirkpatrick, 1976). Further, how participants apply new information is also measured at this stage. The last stage of the Kirkpatrick model is results. Here, practitioners measure and analyze the impact the initiative had at an organizational level (Kirkpatrick, 1976).

Cahapay (2021) maintains that the Kirkpatrick model has many strengths, notably its ability to provide a simple system in dealing with different outcomes and how information about outcomes can be obtained. The four levels of the Kirkpatrick model can also be more straightforward and streamlined than the PTP model's eleven stages. Furthermore, finding literature and use cases on the Kirkpatrick model in student affairs is easier than locating information and use cases of the PTP model. The Kirkpatrick model's sheer prevalence over PTP demonstrates the ease with which it can be adopted. This recommendation is for Education School Admissions and Student Affairs staff to simply consider an additional model of evaluation for their work.

Recommendation Four: Routinely Schedule Student Survey Planning Meetings for Office Stakeholders

Findings from this study were attributed to data analysis of five student surveys, two student survey share-out events, and nine staff interviews. Between my conversations with staff members and a review of pertinent documents, it was clear that while staff are aware of student surveys, most of them are not involved in the survey design process, data analysis, or data share-outs. This was most evident in my conversations with staff from functional areas *other* than student affairs and assessment. Those working in career services, admissions, and academic operations knew about the surveys in general, but could not tell me how they were designed and piloted, or how the data was analyzed. These staff members also did not participate in the recorded survey share-outs that I reviewed. Staff from the functional areas student affairs/support and assessment were, understandably, most familiar with the survey design and planning process. These were the staff hosting share-out events and planning events based on student data. Staff from student affairs are also involved with students (for example, they plan student support events) more often than those across other functional areas.

Recommendation four involves incorporating all office staff in the survey process in survey planning meetings; involving all staff will help to further the culture of assessment within the office, as well as positively contribute to the office's overall culture. While there are multiple approaches to organizational culture, the culture of the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office aligns best with a developmental culture (Berquist, 1992). Trowler (2008) maintains that developmental culture is one that finds meaning primarily in the creation of programs and activities furthering the growth of all members of the collegiate community. To better create data-driven programs and activities, I propose that all Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office staff, from all functional areas, come together in survey planning meetings to learn more about the survey process. Doing so will help to strengthen the professional relationships among staff members, while also ensuring that everyone is aware of student surveys, and how best to collaborate throughout the entire survey process. Coming together as a staff to plan surveys helps to cement the importance of data-driven decision making and planning within a developmental organizational culture. Trowler states "the culture stresses the value of personal openness and service to others, as well as systematic institutional research and curricular planning" (Trowler, p. 5, 2008). Additionally, in these survey planning meetings, staff members could learn more about the PTP model or the Kirkpatrick model and decide which model to adopt.

Recommendation Five: Formalize Student Survey Share-Out Process

As a part of my data collection, I reviewed two transcripts of recorded survey-share outs. In these share outs, staff detailed results from the student assessments, and answered questions that attendees, who were mostly faculty, asked. When looking for documents to review, I could only locate two recorded survey share-outs. While there may have been additional share-outs over the years, I was surprised to only locate two, since student affairs distributes the Pulse Survey semesterly (fall and spring semesters) and the Climate and Belonging Survey every two years. With the frequency of survey dissemination, I thought there would be more share-outs for school stakeholders. For this reason, my fifth recommendation is to formalize the student survey share-out process to schedule a survey share-out, as well as asynchronous data-sharing strategies, following every student affairs survey.

Formalizing the survey share-out process is instrumental in establishing and maintaining a culture of assessment within the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office. Literature on developing a culture of assessment offers several strategies on how best to establish such a culture. Ndoye and Parker (2010) maintain that the following strategies assist with developing a culture of assessment: integrating assessment into daily practice, utilizing institutional leadership, proper use of assessment data, and positive communication. All those facets could be present within a formalized survey share-out process. Currently, student affairs staff host survey share-outs in an *ad hoc* manner; they are irregular (i.e. they did not follow every survey distribution) and Education School leaders such as the dean and associate deans were not present at the two share-outs that I analyzed. Further, formalizing, and thus, building survey share-outs into the survey design and implementation process would ensure that there is positive communication between student affairs staff and other staff, faculty, leadership, and students at the school. Formally building share-outs into the design and implementation process would involve setting a date for the share-out ahead of survey distribution and data analysis; doing so would safeguard that important school stakeholders are aware of the process and invited to learn more about the data and plans for the data.

Further, sharing survey data with students, faculty, and staff is critical to building and maintaining the culture of assessment in the student affairs office. While school stakeholders can (and should) be invited to formal data share-out events, there are other, asynchronous strategies that can be used to share survey data. Between the two buildings that the Education School occupies at Research University, there are several television screens. These screens advertise current and future events, inform stakeholders of key initiatives, and include locations of important offices. These screens could be utilized for asynchronous data sharing; student affairs staff members could design infographics based on survey data for distribution on the television screens. The Education School also has an intranet for faculty and staff members; each office at the school has a dedicated page on the intranet. Another asynchronous data sharing strategy is uploading survey data reports to the intranet for faculty and staff viewing.

Additionally, the CAS standards for assessment within student affairs also maintain the importance of the "assessment cycle." This cycle has four steps, which are: establish/revise goals and learning outcomes, provide learning opportunities, assess goals and outcomes, and use the results (CAS, 2019). Formalizing the survey share-out process is a salient example of using the results. The CAS standards maintain that "to best implement your assessment services, you should help staff and faculty to not only understand the data, but also to explain approaches to using their results" (CAS, 2019, p. 51). Here, CAS also makes the argument for formalizing survey data share-outs to ensure that school stakeholders are aware of and involved with the assessment process. Formalizing the share-out process further helps to increase collaboration between student affairs staff and other stakeholders at the Education School.

Recommendation Six: Develop Post-Event Surveys to Evaluate Student Support Events Designed with Student Data

This case study's sixth and final recommendation is to develop and distribute post-event surveys for Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office events. Throughout the two survey share-out events that I analyzed, student affairs staff indicated that they utilized data from both the Pulse and Climate and Belonging Surveys to plan various student support initiatives at the school. Examples of these initiatives include updating new student orientation programming, offering affinity based-dinners, and developing a graduate-school application workshop for first-generation, limited-income undergraduate students.

While various student assessments exist at the Education School, I learned through interviews and document analysis that student affairs staff do not typically evaluate their events or initiatives after they are completed. Abigail informed me during her interview that before she departed from her Director of Student Affairs role in summer 2023, she was hoping to enact post-event surveys for the team. Unfortunately, once she left her role these surveys were not developed or distributed to students after events. Further, literature regarding student affairs assessment maintains the importance of incorporating assessment into regular practices of student affairs offices. Henning and Bentrim (2022) state that student affairs assessment has become more prevalent and mainstream for practitioners. However, the authors also acknowledge how difficult it is for student affairs practitioners to enact assessment practices, citing budgetary concerns and lack of staffing (Henning & Bentrim, 2022).

For this final recommendation, I propose that Education School Admissions and Student Affairs staff members adopt a common post-event survey to be distributed to all students who attend an event at the school. This post-event survey could also embrace the Kirkpatrick model of evaluation, as presented in recommendation three. Post-event surveys could also help create alignment with PTP model stage ten, which involves evaluating and stage eleven, which involves refining educational experiences. Findings from this case study support this recommendation, as staff have data on student needs, well-being, and sense of belonging, but not on events designed from student data and survey responses. During my interviews with staff (and due to my positionality as a staff member), I learned that Research University, and thus, Education School, has a license to the survey software Qualtrics. Since student affairs staff have access to this system, I suggest they develop common post-event surveys within Qualtrics. Below is a brief outline of questions, and which level of the Kirkpatrick model they may fit in to, for these post-event surveys:

What is your name?

What is your email address?

What is your major or educational program?

How did you find out about this event?

On a scale of 1-5, how satisfied were you with this event? (Reaction)

What did you learn about at this event that you will implement as a student? (Learning)

How likely are you to attend one of our events in the future? (Behavior)

What questions or comments do you have for us?

Lastly, I recommend this survey be utilized for all Education School Admissions and Student Affairs events and initiatives. Utilizing the same survey will allow for trends to appear across the data, which will aid in staff planning future events and initiatives. It will also allow staff to consider the results of their initiative. This recommendation helps to create alignment with steps ten and eleven of the PTP model, which are to evaluate and then refine and reconceptualize student support initiatives. This recommendation also demonstrates alignment with or adoption of the Kirkpatrick model of evaluation. Creating post-event surveys will also further establish a culture of assessment, as staff will have data they can utilize to refine and improve their events.

Considerations for Future Research

This case study evaluated the assessment practices of a small student affairs office at the Education School within Research University. The study helped determine how the office is aligned with some stages of the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model, as well as highlighted what the culture regarding assessment within the office is. The study was conducted at a small college, Education School, within the larger context of Research University. Research University is comprised of twelve schools and serves a population of about 25,000 undergraduate and graduate students. Since there are eleven other schools at Research University, all with decentralized student affairs offices, one consideration for future research is replicating this case study in other student affairs offices at Research University. While the structure of these offices may differ, evaluating alignment with the PTP model and the culture surrounding assessment are helpful tools for student affairs practitioners handling student data, planning student support initiatives, and operating efficiently within their organization. Further, if other offices understand and adopt the PTP model, student affairs partnerships across Research University's campus could be strengthened.

The research questions for this capstone inquired about the PTP model and the culture of assessment within the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office. While it was helpful to learn about this office due to my own positionality as a current student affairs practitioner, another consideration for future research is to learn more about other offices or organizations, either within or outside Research University, who are also utilizing the PTP model. While there is a recent (2019) monograph discussing the model, and its history and importance, locating research on other teams or offices utilizing the PTP model was difficult. If more student affairs practitioners both use the model and publish research on the model, assessment practices in the field of student affairs could improve, and thus, student experiences. Upcraft and Schuh (1996) maintain that student affairs needs to demonstrate its central role in the success of students, and improving assessment practices could aid in this demonstration. I would also be curious to learn more about the PTP model in context of other models of evaluation, such as the Kirkpatrick model.

A limitation of this study was how the former director of student affairs (participant Abigail) departed her role in the summer of 2023. In October of 2023, the office hired a new director; this hire was new to both the Education School and to Research University. With this personnel change (and others), another consideration for future research is to replicate this case study at the Education School in five years, when the current staff of the office may be more established, or to help with future personnel changes within the office. Additionally, this study's recommendations could be adopted and then amended in the next five years. Coordinating another case study would also be a salient way to establish longitudinal data about alignment with the PTP model and the culture of assessment within the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office.

Conclusion

Student affairs assessment is an important part of the student affairs field and is becoming more prevalent within institutions of higher education. Student affairs assessment ranges depending on the institution and team of practitioners. This case study evaluated the assessment practices of the Education School's Admissions and Student Affairs Office to determine alignment with the Practice-to-Theory-to-Practice (PTP) model, as well as the culture of assessment within the office. The student affairs office distributes several student surveys throughout the academic year. In this case study, I reviewed these surveys and survey share-outs. I also interviewed nine current and past staff members of the office who work within various functional areas of student affairs and higher education. From the data I collected, I ascertained there is not full alignment with the eleven steps of the PTP model. There is somewhat of a culture of assessment (a complicated one), and the office does have room to improve upon this culture.

Understanding PTP model alignment and the culture of assessment within the student affairs office can help other small student affairs teams improve their own assessment and student survey practices. Doing so not only allows for practitioners to know more about the students that they serve, but to effectively plan student support initiatives in an environment where budgets are under scrutiny, and student-facing staff members often must justify their existence. The student affairs profession has existed for more than 150 years and will continue to evolve to support students at ever-changing institutions of higher education.

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Appendix A

Subject line: UVA research opportunity

[INSERT DATE]

Dear [INSERT FIRST NAME],

As a doctoral student at the University of Virginia's School of Education and Human Development, I am conducting a research study about the assessment practices of an office in accordance with the practice-to-theory-to-practice (PTP) mode and an office's culture of assessment. I am reaching out to ask if you would be interested in participating in this research project; participation is voluntary.

If you choose to participate, there will be one interview. Each interview will be scheduled for up to 90 minute and will be conducted via Zoom. During this interview, I will ask you questions about the assessments you have assisted with as a staff member. If you are interested, I can also book a private room, as this interview is about the projects and assessments you've worked on as a staff member.

Please see the attached information sheet for more details about the study.

If you have any questions or concerns, or you are interested in participating in this study, please email me at bp2uc@virginia.edu by [INSERT DATE].

I appreciate your consideration of this request.

Bernadette Poerio
Doctoral Student
UVA School of Education and Human Development
Bp2uc@virginia.edu
IRB-SBS #6258

Appendix B

Study Information Sheet

Please read this study information sheet carefully before you decide to participate in the study.

Purpose of the research study: The purpose of this research study is to evaluate the assessment practices of an office in accordance with the practice-to-theory-to-practice (PTP) model, as well as evaluate the culture of assessment within the office. The purpose of this research study is to connect with Admissions and Student Affairs staff members, who will help to evaluate how the office's assessment practices may be aligned with the PTP model, as well as how the assessments and assessment share outs contribute to a culture of assessment within the office.

What you will do in the study: You will be interviewed one time over Zoom, which will be video recorded for transcription. At any point, you can choose to not answer a question if it causes you discomfort. You can stop interviewing at any time.

Time required: This study should take no more than 90 minutes of your time.

Risks: During your participation, you will be asked questions regarding your participation in assessments. It may be difficult or challenging to recall these answers.

Benefits: There are no direct benefits to you for participating in this research study. The study may help us understand how student assessments contribute to the student experience at the school.

Confidentiality: The information that you give in the study will be handled confidentially. Your information will be assigned a pseudonym and the list connecting your name to the pseudonym will be kept in a locked file. When the study is completed and the data has been analyzed, this list will be destroyed. Your name will not be used in any report. At the conclusion of the study, I will destroy recordings of your interview. Your name and other information that could be used to identify you will not be collected or linked to the data.

Voluntary participation: Your participation in the study is completely voluntary. Your decision to participate will have no effect on your employment.

Right to withdraw from the study: You have the right to withdraw from the study at any time without penalty. Should you choose to withdraw from the study any recordings will be destroyed.

How to withdraw from the study: At any point in the study, you may withdraw. If you want to withdraw from the study during the interview, you should stop the interview and let the interviewer know. There is no penalty for withdrawing. If you would like to withdraw after your interview, please contact the interviewer using the contact information below.

Compensation: There is no compensation for this study.

Using data beyond this study: The data you provide in this study will be retained in a secure manner by the researcher for five years and then destroyed.

Please contact the researchers on the study team listed below to:

- **Obtain more information or ask a question about the study.**
- **Report an illness, injury, or other problem.**
- **Leave the study before it is finished**

If you have questions about the study, please contact:
Bernadette Poerio
UVA School of Education and Human Development
PO Box 400873
405 Emmet Street S
Charlottesville, VA 22903
Telephone: 908-616-7361
Email: bp2uc@virginia.edu

Christian Steinmetz
UVA School of Education and Human Development:
PO Box 400277
405 Emmet Street S
Charlottesville, VA 22903
Telephone: 434-924-3180
Email address: cls5p@virginia.edu

To obtain more information about the study, ask questions about the research procedures, express concerns about your participation, or report other problems, please contact:
Tonya R. Moon, Ph.D.
Chair, Institutional Review Board for the Social and Behavioral Sciences
One Morton Dr. Suite 500
University of Virginia, P.O. Box 800392
Charlottesville, VA 22908-0392
Telephone: 434-924-5999
Email: irbsbshelp@virginia.edu
Website: https://research.virginia.edu/irb-sbs
Website for research participants: https://research.virginia.edu/research-participants

You will receive a copy of this form for your records.

Appendix C

Interview Protocol: Employees of Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office

IRB-SBS #6258

Title: Evaluating Assessment Practices and Culture Within a Student Affairs Office: A Case Study

Interviewer: Bernadette Poerio

Interviewee:

Date and time:

Location: Zoom

Capstone Project Research Questions:

1. How do the current assessment practices of the University of Virginia School of Education and Human Development Office of Admissions and Student Affairs office align with the PTP model?
2. What is the culture surrounding assessment in the student affairs office?

Consent:

- Thank you so much for agreeing to participate in this interview and capstone project.
- Review information sheet and obtain verbal consent.
- Are there any questions that I can answer for you at this time?

Participant Background Questions

- I am aware that our office has multiple divisions within it. What division, or functional area, do you work in?
    - How long have you held this position?
    - How long have you worked at EHD? At UVA?

Questions Related to Capstone Project Research Questions

- Tell me about the current student assessments that the EHD Admissions and Student Affairs office deploys.

- What are these assessments?
- How are you a part of the assessment process?

- Tell me about the process of creating a student assessment.

(see table below for next stage of the interview)

Stage	**Interview Question(s)**	**Answer**	**Notes**
1. Identify pragmatic concerns.	• Tell me how student concerns are identified before an assessment is deployed. • How does your office know which concerns student assessments will address?		
2. Determine educational goals	• How is your office designing assessments with specific educational goals in mind? • Walk me through how these educational goals were identified.		
3. Examine which theories are helpful.	• Tell me how your office works with student development theory. • How do you see student theory utilized within the assessment process?		
4. Analyze student/stakeholder characteristics in context of theory.	• What is known about students before the assessments are designed/deployed?		
5. Analyze environmental	• Tell me how the environment		

characteristics in context of theory.	(university, school, current events, etc.) is considered throughout the assessment process?		
6. Translate.	• Overall, how do you utilize student development theory in your day to day work? • How does the current environment within your office support Education School students?		Conscious versus intuitively do
7. Re-analyze educational goals.	• Tell me how educational goals or concerns are revisited throughout the assessment process.		
8. Design.	• How are you involved when student assessments are designed?		
9. Implement.	• How do you see assessments implemented at Education School?		
10. Evaluate.	• Tell me how assessment practices are evaluated.		
11. Refine and reconceptualize.	• Tell me how student assessments are refined.		

- A culture of assessment is defined as “an organizational environment in which decisions are based on facts, research, and analysis, and where services are planned and delivered in ways that maximize positive outcomes and impacts for customers and stakeholders" (Lakos & Phipps, 2004, p. 352).

- How are decisions about assessments made in the office?
- Tell me how student services are planned?
- Are planned services based on desired positive outcomes for students? If so, how?

Closing

- Thank you for participating in this interview. All recordings and transcriptions from the interview will be assigned a pseudonym and stored in a secure, password-protected location to protect your privacy.
- I noticed a few themes that emerged throughout this interview. Some of them are X, X,X. Do you agree? Did you notice any other themes?
- Do you have any additional thoughts or questions that you would like to add before we conclude?
- Thank you again for your time. If you have any questions or thoughts that come up after this interview, you can reach me at bp2uc@virginia.edu.

Appendix D

List of Documents Reviewed

Surveys

1. Climate Survey- 2018

2. Climate and Belonging Survey- Fall 2021

3. Pulse Survey- Fall 2020

4. Pulse Survey- Spring 2021

5. Pulse Survey- Spring 2023

Survey Share-Outs

1. Fall 2021 Climate and Belonging Survey Share Out (shared in Spring 2022)

2. Spring 2023 Pulse Survey Share Out

Appendix E

Document Analysis Protocol

Document Analysis Protocol:

IRB-SBS #6258

Title: Evaluating Assessment Practices and Culture Within a Student Affairs Office: A Case Study

Capstone Project Research Questions:

1. How do the current assessment practices of the Education School student affairs office align with the PTP model?
2. What is the culture surrounding assessment in the student affairs office?

Document Analysis Protocol:

Document	**Location**	**Inclusion Criteria**	**Date of Last Edit**	**PTP Stage Evidence**	**Notes**
Climate Survey 2018	Qualtrics	- first survey of its kind -stemmed from white supremacy rallies -distributed to all degree and certificate seeking students			
Climate and Belonging Survey 2021	Qualtrics	-distributed to all degree and certificate seeking students -distributed during the COVID-19 pandemic			
Pulse Survey- Fall 2020	Qualtrics	-distributed to all degree and certificate seeking students -first time this was distributed			

		-distributed because of the COVID-19 pandemic			
Pulse Survey-Spring 2021	Qualtrics	-distributed to all degree and certificate seeking students			
Pulse Survey-Spring 2023	Qualtrics	-distributed to all degree and certificate seeking students			
Fall 2021 Climate and Belonging Survey Share Out	Slideshow	- faculty and staff invited -robust staffing at this time			
Spring 2023 Pulse Survey Share Out	Video Recording-Canvas Studio	- faculty and staff invited			

Appendix F

Data Management Plan

IRB-SBS #6258

Title: Aligning Assessment Practices with the PTP Model in a Student Affairs Office: A Case Study

This plan describes how I securely managed, organized, and stored the data that I collected as a part of the capstone project.

Data Types and Storage

The types of data generated came from stakeholder interviews and document analysis. Recording from the semi-structured interviews were Zoom recordings, as well as interview transcripts that are word documents. Zoom interviews were conducted throughout December 2023 until January 2024, after the IRB was approved on December 12, 2023. Furthermore, documents for document analysis were uploaded to Dedoose after IRB approval; these documents were past surveys and survey share-outs. All data (videos, transcripts, documents, and notes) were uploaded to UVA's Microsoft OneDrive system, which is a cloud-based, password-protected system. Only I have access to this data.

Data Organization and Documentation

To best organize and document my data, I created a folder titled Capstone Materials within the UVA Microsoft OneDrive system that is password protected. Within this folder, I created subfolders for both interview and document analysis data.

1. The interview data folder was called "Poerio Capstone Interview Data." In this folder, the interview protocol was uploaded. Then, there were subfolders for each participant interviewed. Within these subfolders were the interview transcript, interview audio recording, interview reflexive journal, and notes from the actual interview. There were eight interviews with full-time employees, and one interview with a part-time employee, in the Education School Admissions and Student Affairs Office.

2. The document analysis data folder was called “Poerio Capstone Document Analysis Data.” In this folder, the document analysis protocol was uploaded. Additionally, word or PDF documents of the surveys or survey share-outs were uploaded, along with the reflexive journal I kept for each document that I analyzed.

Data Access

All data that I gathered throughout this capstone project was uploaded to a folder within the UVA Microsoft OneDrive system. All interview participants were assigned pseudonyms. Participant identifying information was kept in a separate Microsoft Excel document. This document was uploaded to UVA Microsoft OneDrive. Furthermore, as the principal investigator of this research study, only I have complete access to the data that is described above. This data can be shared with other researchers, students, or stakeholders, but only if I grant access. For this capstone project, no high-security or sensitive data was collected.

Data Sharing and Reuse

Data from this capstone project will not be used by anyone else. I am open to the idea of one day publishing this study. To potentially use this data in the future, I ensured that the types of documents I save are usable, as well as how the documents are titled. Furthermore, if this project were to be published, I need to be aware of different publication’s policies on data.

Data Preservation and Archiving

UVA’s IRB-SBS policy maintains that data should be kept for five years (Record Keeping, n.d.). UVA IRB does allow for records to be kept indefinitely, if they are secure. To aid in preserving all collected data, including video recordings, transcripts, documents, and document analysis, I saved them in a way that is easily accessible in the future.