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The QUEST: Journal of Higher Education Excellence

The QUEST: Journal of Higher Education Excellence is a peer reviewed professional research journal whose primary purpose is the collection and dissemination of Multiculturalism in Education research, theory, and practice on all multi-culturally related aspects of primary, secondary, and post-secondary education around the world.

The Editors are looking for manuscripts that take as their topic the full range of Interdisciplinary and Liberal Arts related issues in primary, secondary and higher education worldwide. It is the hope of the editorial board that reports of quality research and practice will be published from schools around the world. Submitted manuscripts might take the form of (but are not strictly limited to) original empirical articles, theoretical analyses, book reviews, commentaries, literature reviews/conceptual analysis and reports of successful practices in higher education. Theoretically driven studies of hypotheses that have implications for understanding and improving the study and practice of diverse educational communities are particularly encouraged. Authors of manuscripts examining basic theory and research should identify implications for more applied topics, and authors of manuscripts dealing with more applied topics should draw conclusions that are relevant to basic research and theory.

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The QUEST: Journal of Higher Education Excellence
2901 Liberty Heights Avenue
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Welcome to the *QUEST: Journal of Higher Education Excellence* (QJHEE). QJHEE is a peer-reviewed, online published journal devoted to advancing scholarship and practice in the areas of Interdisciplinary Studies, Multicultural Education, and Minority Males in education with an emphasis on the African American and Hispanic male. QJHEE publishes research on a variety of educational issues. More so, QJHEE features articles that are grounded in research, theory and experiential knowledge, as well as, promote critical examination of issues facing minority males in education.

This edition of the (QJHEE) is dedicated to the Honorable Michael R. Butler. Truly, we miss your contributions and your positive energy. Certainly—we are assured that you are in a better place. Rest—peacefully!

---Professor Jà Hon Vance
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The QUEST: Journal of Higher Education Excellence

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The QUEST: Special Education Commentary

Featuring:

Professor Lorraine Brown, Program Coordinator
Department of Education, Social and Behavioral Sciences
Baltimore City Community College
In the 1980’s I met a man while taking undergraduate courses at Coppin State College, (Now University). I had the opportunity to meet a professor that I would come to admire more than any other professor during my matriculation at the school. If you were fortunate, you had the same experience. The professor’s name was Michael Butler. He was many things that transcended what I believed to be a college professor. First, he was the complete package. Many of my professors were noted scholars in the subjects that they taught. Some were very accomplished practitioners in their fields. Others were very articulate and had a mesmerizing way of phrasing their words. Others were well traveled! But Michael Butler embodied all of those characteristics and more!

Michael was very polished in all of those areas, boy he could dress! He wore sharp Italian suits, and the most expensive shoes that I had ever seen. His shirts were custom made with his initials embroidered on his cuff. You couldn’t help but notice. He was very impressive! Growing up in tough East Baltimore without a father and no big brother to emulate, I yearned for the day that I could become affiliated with a Black man that had the looks of a movie star, the intelligence of a scholar, the street smarts of a tough guy, and the credentials of a leader! Don’t get me wrong, I had many positive Black men in my life growing up. My uncles, older cousins, family friends, my high school track coach, one or two good men from my neighborhood, and a few others. As much as I love them, none of them had it all! Michael seemed to have it all!
While at Coppin, Michael taught me many things. However, what he taught me the most was the importance of professionalism. He taught me that presentation was your ticket into the mainstream. He often talked about first impressions, the ability to express yourself clearly and concisely, and boy writing! He used to tell the class that being minority meant that you had to stand out in all of those areas. Writing was the challenge with Professor Butler! He didn’t except anything! He was quick to correct your grammar and would challenge you to use more sophisticated synonyms. He taught me the art and science of delegation. He used words in his lectures like accountability and responsibility. He taught me the difference between the two, and how to use them appropriately.

After I graduated and earned my Bachelor of Science degree in Criminal Justice, I kept in touch with Professor Butler, who wouldn’t! He told me that my studying had just begun! As I ascended the ranks of the Baltimore Police Department, he was impressed! I thanked him many times. He would often say that I would one day become Police Commissioner, I almost did! I became a full Colonel, thanks to professors like Michael. After a twenty plus year career in the Police Department something happened that I couldn’t have ever predicted, I would have the honor to become his colleague at the Baltimore City Community College. We talked every day. He would come to my office at the end of the day and would say “Just checking in” You could hear him walking down the hall! I knew his walk. He would always speak to somebody in his strong baritone voice on his way to my office! Hello young man he would often be heard saying! His laugh, I really miss. He had a wonderful sense of humor!

Life is funny, as I write this tribute to my friend, teacher, role model, and fraternity brother, I realized how much I took for granted! I attended his very last lecture! Something compelled me that night to stop by. I didn’t usually sit in, although he always invited me. I had no idea that it would be the twilight of his life, literally his last days. Again, Mike taught me, live life to the fullest and do what you were created to do on this earth until the very end. I believe in God and firmly believe that God was giving us a strong message and used Mike as the vessel to deliver that message. I believe God has told us in recent days, weeks and months at the Baltimore City Community College to do several things if the college is to survive. First, put students at the forefront! That’s why we’re all here. Second, treat others as you would like to be treated, stop the fighting, engaging in acts of cruelty, stop the vindictiveness, and eliminate hypocrisy! And lastly, no matter how educated you are, how well you dress, how many degrees you’ve earned, and how much you own or have acquired, none of it matters if you do not respect people or use it to inspire others and we all have an expiration date.

I pledged Michael’s fraternity, Omega Psi Phi Fraternity, Incorporated. Not because Mike pledged Omega. In fact, I didn’t even know that Mike was a Q, as we are called until after I pledged! He never told me that while at Coppin. I believe that I pledged because of what Mike taught me. The Greek meaning of Omega Psi Phi is “Friendship is Essential to the Soul” Our cardinal principles are Manhood, Scholarship, Perseverance, and Uplift! Michael truly embodied the Omega spirit:

*Manhood* - Role Model, Big Brother to his many siblings and leader of his family
Scholarship- BS Political Science, Morgan State College (Now University)

MS Urban Planning, Morgan State College (Now University)

JD University of Maryland School of Law

Perseverance- Business Owner, Manager, Executive, Community Leader, Military Officer and Educator

Uplift- People like me!!! Role model, Advisor, Teacher and much more!

Thank you Michael for your many years of friendship, advice, being a role model and guiding light! Your family, friends, colleagues, and students are better people because of you!!! You will be sorely missed but never forgotten as your legacy will continue to live on in all of the many lives that you’ve touched.

Your friend, student, and colleague,

Ed Jackson
Assistant Professor, Criminal Justice
Colonel, Baltimore Police Department Retired
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Professor Vance, Executive Director of Journal Publications

The QUEST: Journal of Higher Education Excellence
2901 Liberty Heights Avenue
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Exploring Community College Institutional Effectiveness Literature

Authors: Clevette M. Ridguard, Ed. D., Montgomery College
          Calvin B. Ball, Ed. D., Baltimore City Community College

Community colleges are considered “the most successful institution in the twentieth century in American higher education” (Cain, 1999, p. 313). They provide upward mobility and educational opportunities to the masses (Pollard, 2011). Nearly half of the nation’s students begin their higher education at one of the nation’s almost 1,200 community colleges (AACC, 2013; Nunley, Bers, & Manning, 2011). According to Gumport (2003) and Bailey and Morest (2004), community colleges are dynamic institutions with a comprehensive, multi-faceted mission that serve a broad range of educational, social, and economic functions to meet student and community needs:

1. Academic transfer preparation
2. Vocational, technical, contract, and workforce development education
3. General education and developmental education
4. Continuing education, lifelong learning, and non-credit courses.

American community colleges award close to 1 million degrees and certificates and span all 50 states in the nation (AACC, 2013, p. 4). More than 60% of the students are enrolled part time, and many serve other roles, such as, employee, parent, spouse, and/or caretaker (Nunley et al., 2011). Community colleges are diverse in their student populations with ethnic representation among African American (49%), Hispanic (56%), Asian/Pacific Islander (44%), and Native American (42%) populations. More than 40% are first-generation students—meaning they are the first one in their families to attend college (AACC, 2013, p. 4). Because community colleges offer an array of services, these institutions are constantly subject to myriad demands and performance expectations (Eaton, 2007). However, there are a limited number of common measurements that can prove the quality and value of community colleges, considering the variety of distinct college missions and their students’ diverse educational goals (Kramer & Swing, 2010).

THE COMMUNITY COLLEGE CHALLENGE

There is juxtaposition between the traditional open-access policy of community colleges and the expectation for increased student success, graduation, and completion. Many students arrive at community colleges unprepared for academic rigor and have to take developmental, or remedial, courses. It can be challenging for these students to complete their programs or transfer within the given national performance timelines and benchmarks (Nunley et al., 2011). Similarly, public two-year institutions are challenged by demands state and local funding sources placed on them to operate with decreased budgets, calls for greater accountability, growth in technology and online learning, and competition from for-profit institutions (Boggs, 2011; Ewell, 2009; Kezar & Eckel,
Historically, evaluating the quality of higher education focused on measurable characteristics such as fiscal soundness, faculty credentials, library holdings, and curricular consistency (CRAC, 2003). Currently, the shift to student learning outcomes, student completion and achievement, and other performance measures has presented a distinct challenge for community college leadership. Leaders strive to create and promote measures that fully exhibit their institutional and student success. These performance measures are collected as part of the institutional effectiveness process that the president is expected to lead (AACC, 2011).

**INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Institutional effectiveness is an important framework used to determine educational quality at higher education institutions (Head, 2011). The components of institutional effectiveness include student learning outcomes assessment, program review, general education review, evaluation of educational support and administrative services, strategic planning, performance benchmarking, quality measurements, accreditation functions, and institutional research (Welsh, Petrosko, & Metcalf, 2003). The term *institutional effectiveness* originated from the Southern Association of Colleges and Schools (SACS) accrediting region. SACS (2012) defined institutional effectiveness as a “systematic, explicit, and documented process of measuring performance against mission on all aspects of institutions” (SACS, p. 9). SACS measures institutional educational quality against its processes and its ability to achieve its mission and goals. According to SACS, “The institution identifies expected outcomes, assess[es] the extent to which it achieves these outcomes, and provides evidence of improvements based on analysis of the results” (p. 27).

**COMPONENTS OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Institutional effectiveness is a cyclical process in that an institution (a) starts with a defined purpose; (b) identifies goals, objectives, and outcomes; (c) performs assessments and evaluations; and (d) uses the results for improvements (Manning, 2011). Institutional effectiveness processes help the institution continually improve procedures and policies to align them with its mission and goals. The literature and all regional accreditation guidelines present certain common *assessment tasks* and core components of any assessment activity that measures institutional effectiveness: (a) planning for the institutional effectiveness process, (b) identifying goals, (c) assessing those goals, and (d) using the results to generate institutional improvements (Banta, Black, Kahn, & Jackson, 2004; Ewell, 2009; Maki, 2010; SCAS, 2012, Suskie, 2009). These assessment indicators apply when measuring institutional effectiveness as a unit or any of its components, such as student learning outcomes, strategic planning and budget allocations, program review, and student services assessment.

The New Leadership Alliance for Student Learning and Accountability (2010), which is endorsed by 27 higher education associations, published *Guidelines for Assessment and Accountability in Higher Education*. These guidelines highlight the universal aspects of assessment tasks: (a) set goals, (b) gather evidence, (c) use evidence for improvements, and (d) report evidence and results. While institutions may label these tasks differently and delineate them with numerous sub-tasks, the four tasks mentioned are common for implementing or assessing any institutional effectiveness process. Table 1 outlines specific details and relevant questions within the core assessment tasks of institutional effectiveness.
Table 1:

*Major Tasks Used in Institutional Effectiveness Process*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Major Tasks</th>
<th>Sub-Tasks Addressed in Question Format</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. Planning for the</td>
<td>What are the established timelines and parameters of the process? Who will be involved and at what level? How is the process linked to the institution’s mission and goals? How are common terminology and language established and communicated? What are the duties and responsibilities of those involved? What resources are needed? How do committees and sub-committees for institutional effectiveness function, integrate processes, inform the college community about activities, and gather input? How are all the voices at the institution heard? What about a budget for the process? How do these processes relate to institutional budget and resource allocations?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assessment</td>
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<tr>
<td>2. Identifying the</td>
<td>What does the institution want to assess and at what level (institutional, program, course, student services, library, etc.)? What are the processes for each assessment, and how are they different? Is there assessment overlap? What outcomes are to be assessed? What data sets exist to conduct the assessment, and what data sets are needed? Are there standard performance measures mandates that must be considered?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>3. Assessing the</td>
<td>What are the assessment instruments? What are the tools, forms, etc. that will be used to conduct the assessment? What are the workflows and timelines to conduct assessment? What are the expectations of those involved in the assessment?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Outcomes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. Providing Evidence</td>
<td>How are assessment results used to make changes and/or modifications to the institution demonstrating improvements in measurable terms? What was learned, and/or what was changed or enhanced as a result of assessment activities? What is the timeline for change? What is the feedback process? As a result of the assessment, how are anticipated improvements communicated to the internal and external community? How are improvements monitored?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>for Improvements</td>
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*Note:* Adapted from Banta, et al., 2004; Banta, Jones & Black, 2009; Bresciani, 2006; Ewell, 2009; Hoey, 1995; Kramer & Swing, 2010; Maki, 2010; Nichols & Nichols, 2005; SACS, 2012; Suskie, 2009; Volkwein, 2009; Walvoord, 2010.
INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS AND STAKEHOLDERS

Stakeholders, both external and internal to the institution, are monitoring community colleges and holding them to standards of educational excellence and quality (Volkwein, 2009). For example, externally, the public is asking for data-informed decision-making and proof of student learning and success using qualitative and quantitative data. Various segments of the public question the return on investment of higher education (Dodd, 2004; Ewell, 2009). Policymakers are interested in “high performance and achieving better student retention and graduation rates; employers are interested in the development of programs that meet workforce needs; and students want conveniences, value, and quality” (Alfred, Ewell, Hudgins, & McClenny, 1999, p. i). Governments at all levels want to know if funds are being spent wisely, and some states are mandating performance metrics. In addition, regional accreditation agencies have shifted from requiring evidence of assessment processes to requesting assessment results that demonstrate institutional improvements.

Internally, colleges have had to institute assessment processes and demonstrate results that will answer the call for accountability and assessment at the student, course, program, and institutional level (Ewell, 2009). Teaching and learning and their impact on students’ needs are to be assessed in meaningful ways to generate improvements for student success. Demonstrated, measurable outcomes are necessary to document that students are learning and are prepared for the workforce. Assessing these student learning outcomes is centered on key competencies and skills. Critical thinking, information literacy, oral and written communication, and collaboration are among the needed competencies for an educated citizenry to function effectively in the workplace and in communities (Friedman & Mandelbaum, 2011). To fully understand the details of institutional effectiveness, a review of assessment, accountability, and accreditation is essential.

ASSESSMENT

According to Suskie (2009), academic assessment is the “systematic collection, review, and use of information and data about educational programs for the purpose of improving student learning and development” (p. 4). The outcomes of academic assessment activities document what students are learning and whether students are learning. Community college assessment of student learning outcomes measures student progress at the program and general education competency levels. Student learning outcomes assessment enables institutions to know “how their specific curricula practices and programs make a difference in their students’ cognitive and affective development” (SACS, 2012, p. 42).

Assessment is essential for improving the quality of educational offerings and demonstrating that students are prepared academically for the next phase of their lives, be it to transfer to a four-year institution, to secure employment, to earn a certificate demonstrating mastery of a particular skill set, or to graduate (Bailey & Morest, 2004). Assessing student learning ideally is embedded in ongoing course instruction. The process is a continuous one aimed at intertwining teaching and learning so students can be assessed, evaluated, retaught (if necessary), and reassessed until they reach acceptable level of competencies.
Funded by the League of Innovation in the Community College (The League) and the Pew Charitable Trust, the 21st Century Learning Outcomes Project was to develop “a set of cross-curricular, core competencies that two-year college graduates should have to succeed in work and to transfer to a four-year school” (Miles & Wilson, 2004, p. 89). These competencies, according to Miles and Wilson (2004):

1. Communication skills (oral and written)
2. Computation skills (math and scientific reasoning)
3. Critical thinking and problem-solving skills
4. Interpersonal and personal skills (teamwork, conflict resolution, wellness, and aesthetics)
5. Technology skills (information literacy).

The culture of assessment has become engrained in all activities of the academy, from student services, shared governance processes, board relations, and strategic plans. Institutions are preoccupied with assessing if processes are working. A recent example of this is the Principle of Effective Assessment of Student Achievement statement draft released in July 2013 and endorsed by all regional accrediting agencies and six major educational associations (AACCJC, 2013). The statement highlights that:

The challenges for community colleges are to develop the capacity to discuss what the results of learning assessment mean, to identify ways of improving student learning, and to make institutional commitments to that improvement by planning, allocating necessary resources, and implementing strategies for improvements (Beno, 2004, p. 67).

Not only is this challenging with student learning outcomes, using results also entails institutional assessment of administrative functions and student services. Assessment activities apply across all institutional programs, processes, activities, and committees. Of equal challenge is documenting assessment results for institutional improvements and for comparison among institutions. Assessment and accountability complement each other. Assessment is the internal mode of the core process of continuous inquiry and improvement. Accountability, along with accreditation, is the external mechanism for documenting assessment activities for transparency of institutional effectiveness (Maki, 2010).

ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability was significantly impacted by former U.S. Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings’ Commission on the Future of Higher Education (Basken, 2007), often referred to as the Spellings Commission Report. Declaring that critical review of higher education in the United States had been neglected for too long, the report focused on several key areas of concern: access, affordability, quality, and accountability. This report was meant to address issues familiar to academics and include the interests of business and industry (Eddy, 2010).
Several other policy reports contributed to the demand for accountability. In 2000, the National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education published its first *Measuring Up* report on the educational performance of individual states. This report is updated bi-annually and includes international data. The *Measuring Up* reports highlight the deficits and achievements of higher education in the United States and emphasize education as a public commodity that needs to be monitored as a matter of public policy (Ewell & Jones, 2006). McClenney (2004) agreed, “Accountability is not just inevitable, it is a good thing, because community colleges are public institutions; they have an obligation to publicly report results” (p. 5). Another aspect to the accountability agenda was promoted by the Business-Higher Education Forum, sponsored by the American Council on Education. This report, *Public Accountability for Student Learning in Higher Education*, urged colleges and universities to engage in student learning and assessment and to publish their results for public review. Business leaders note that employers want new hires to have certain competencies and skills evident in students’ learning and educational results (Ewell & Jones, 2006).

The emphasis on gathering student learning data using uniform, systematic methods was the focus of a 2005 report from the National Commission on Accountability for the State Higher Education Executive Officers (SHEEO). This publication endorsed a proposal from the National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) to create a national student record system that publishes reviews from accrediting agencies. The report also discusses the format and frequency for conveying student learning outcomes data to the federal government (Phillipe, 2011).

Over the past decade, the requirements for accountability have grown beyond simple assessment reporting for state and local legislatures. Performance reporting, metrics, and indicators are required in some states and are used to compare peer institutions given a set of common benchmarks. Burke and Minassians (2004) conducted a higher education performance indicator study in 29 states, which revealed a disregard for the uniqueness of community colleges and their diverse clientele. Community college leaders realize performance indicators are the new accountability measures that are linked to increase funding, therefore echoing a greater need for accountability. Because there is a lack of comparative data for policymakers and government officials, additional forms of national benchmarking are on the horizon (Burke & Minassians, 2004).

Historically, one of the primary measures of performance benchmarking has been student graduation rates. The Integrated Postsecondary Education Data System (IPEDS) is a system of interrelated surveys collected by the U.S. Department of Education’s National Center for Education Statistics (NCES). Every college, university, and technical and vocational institution that receives federal student financial aid is required to report data on enrollments, program completions, graduation rates, faculty and staff, finances, institutional prices, and student financial aid (IPEDS, n.d.). Graduation rates that are reported to IPEDS are the only consistent measure for a national sample of community colleges’ performance (Bailey & Xu, 2012). The definition of a graduation rate is the first-time, full-time student who earns a degree or certificate at the institution within 150% of the expected completion time for the program in which he or she is enrolled (NCES, 2013). This definition of graduation rate favors the traditional student who attends full-time and who mostly likely attends a four-year college.
However, it does not provide an accurate picture of community college students. Usually graduation rates in community colleges are low, averaging in the 20%-to-30% range of student completion (Bailey & Xu, 2012). Nevertheless, these rates should be evaluated in context and do not reflect the non-traditional students who make up the largest population of community college students. Students who attend community colleges are typically part-time, working, adult students with the responsibility of caring for children or adult parents. Therefore, using the IPEDS graduation rates excludes a large portion of the community college student population.

The *Completion Agenda* (2013) calls for a national increase in graduation rates to 55% percent by 2025. The *Completion Agenda* impacts accountability by requiring institutions to collect data unique and specific to community colleges. These data include graduation rates for part-time and transfer students, critical milestones of student progress, and credit accumulation data. Aided by Complete College America and the National Governors Association, states are asked to commit to college completion by setting state completion goals, developing action plans, and collecting common measures of student progress (Complete College America, n.d.). Assessment, accountability, and pressures from accrediting agencies indicate that the era of monitoring effectiveness and transparency in higher education is here to stay.

**ACCREDITATION**

The third component of institutional effectiveness is accreditation. In the United States, accreditation began in the 19th century to prevent external control over educational standards (Dodd, 2004). Accreditation is the “voluntary, collegial process of self-review and peer review for improvement of academic quality and public accountability of institutions and programs” (CHEA, 2012). It is the primary means of quality assurance and institutional effectiveness improvements in higher education in the United States (Beno, 2004; Combs, 2001). At the completion of each review, the accrediting agency renders a decision or judgment to accredit, accredit with conditions, or not accredit (Ball, 2008). This quality review process occurs on a periodic basis, usually every 10 years. Four primary benefits of accreditation have been recognized: (a) quality assurance, (b) access to federal and state funding, (c) acceptance of credentials in the workplace, and (d) transfer of credits (Eaton, 2009).

**Types of accreditations.** Four types of accreditations exist in the United States: (a) regional accrediting bodies that operate within a specific geographic area and accredit public and private, mainly non-profit and degree-granting, two-and four-year institutions; (b) programmatic, specialized accreditations that review particular programs, and professional and freestanding schools, such as law, medicine, and engineering; (c) national faith-related accreditations that accredit religiously affiliated institutions, both non-profit and degree-granting; and (d) national career-related accreditations that accredit for-profit, career-based, single-purpose institutions, both degree and non-degree (Eaton, 2009).

The Department of Education, along with the Council for Higher Education Accreditation (CHEA) (2012), recognizes six regional accrediting agencies:

1. Middle States Commission of Higher Education (MSCHE)
2. North Central Association of Colleges and Schools (NCACS)
3. New England Association of Schools and Colleges (NEASC)
4. Northwest Commission of Colleges and Universities (NCCU)
5. Southern Association of Colleges and Schools Commission (SACS)
6. Western Association of Schools and Colleges (WASC).
   a. Accrediting Commission for Community and Junior Colleges (WASC-ACCJC).
   b. Accrediting Commission for Senior Colleges and Universities (WASC-ACSCU).

However, as of January 2012, NCCU is no longer accredited by CHEA (2012). All six regional accreditation agencies have some expectations for student learning outcomes, assessment, and institutional effectiveness (Head, 2011; Manning, 2011). All regional accreditors expect learning outcomes to be defined, articulated, assessed, and documented proof that assessment results guide institutional improvements (Head, 2011). Rather than being prescriptive, most accreditation regions provide guidelines. Accrediting agencies not only expect that assessment processes are in place, but they also are looking for evidence of overall institutional improvements in teaching and learning practices that benefit students.

Regional accreditation agencies play a prominent role in driving assessment and institutional effectiveness agendas by setting standards for both in their evaluation requirements. All regional accrediting agencies require community colleges to demonstrate compliance with institutional effectiveness standards. Complying with accreditation standards provides an assurance that institutional effectiveness in higher education will not vanish (Beno, 2004; Head, 2011; Maki, 2010). Accreditation is a four-step process: (a) institutional self-assessment, (b) review team visit and written report, (c) institutional response, and (d) accreditation agency action.

Accreditors have sustained the need for better institutional assessment plans and results that promote higher quality education. The higher education accreditation process tries vigorously to stay ahead of imposing regulations from the federal government (Eaton, 2011). Three examples are noteworthy. First, the Council of Regional Accrediting Commissions (C-RAC) (2003) established the principles of good practices outlining what a regional accrediting agency should expect from one of its institutions as it relates to student learning. Second, the Council of Higher Education Association (CHEA) is monitoring and responding to greater demands for federal government compliance and control, as evidenced in its recent publications (CHEA, 2011, 2013). Third, the 2012 report from the National Advisory Committee for Institutional Quality and Integrity (NACIQI) called for common standards for assessing academic quality across accrediting regions (Eaton, 2012). These examples highlight concerns the federal government has about educational quality and the possible need for greater regulation. Organizations involved in accreditation are resisting greater regulation imposition by the federal government and are remaining proactive in their approach to monitoring educational quality.

**RESEARCH STUDIES ON INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Four research studies conducted in the SACS region share common findings that examine institutional effectiveness and involvement of the president, administrators, faculty, and staff (Ball, 2008; Skolits & Graybeal, 2007; Todd & Baker, 1998; Welsh et al, 2003). In their quantitative
research, Todd and Baker (1998) used a stratified random sampling of community colleges in the SACS region to determine current institutional effectiveness practices and the level of importance community college professionals place on institutional effectiveness. The reported findings show increased faculty and administrative commitment was needed for institutional effectiveness, and institutional effectiveness is more successful when it is incorporated into the institutions’ regular operating processes (Todd & Baker, 1998). Welsh et al. (2003) conducted a similar study with a sample size of 168 community colleges to ascertain faculty and administrators’ perspectives regarding the importance of institutional effectiveness. Findings from this study indicated that if the president understands the faculty’s thinking, he or she can advocate for institutional effectiveness activities and better rally participation and support for these activities. Also, the findings suggest the need for communication and collaboration within the institution, because these factors will help the faculty see the purpose of institutional effectiveness.

Skolits and Graybeal (2007) used a mixed-methods research design at one Tennessee community college in the SACS region to test the influence of institutional effectiveness processes on faculty and staff. The study proposed three research questions regarding “institutional effectiveness at the campus level, the perception of the faculty and staff regarding institutional effectiveness practices, and barriers to the institutional effectiveness experiences” (p. 302). The research findings indicated that the leader must set the tone and remain involved in the process. In addition, the faculty and staff need direction and support from the president when working on institutional effectiveness, especially in creating professional development opportunities, finding time to participate in assessment activities, and working with assessment and outcomes data.

Again in the SACS region, Ball’s (2008) research study surveyed a sample of community college chief institutional effectiveness officers (CIEO) to address (a) the role of the president in implementing of institutional effectiveness, and (b) the impact of institutional characteristics on presidential involvement in institutional effectiveness. The study concluded that while institutional characteristics were of no significance to institutional effectiveness, the president often plays a key role in its implementation. Ball (2008) asserted that presidents are often involved in institutional effectiveness. Ridguard (2014) conducted a similar study in the Middle States region and determined that from the CIEO perspective, community college presidents are almost always involved in planning institutional effectiveness efforts and are often involved in identifying, assessing, and using outcomes results for institutional improvements.

Two research studies (Boothe, 2002; Sambolin, 2010) that were conducted nationally at four-year institutions substantiated the findings that institutional effectiveness requires specific leadership. Also, institutional effectiveness must be conducted in conjunction with the strategic planning and budgetary processes. Sambolin’s (2010) findings identified prevailing presidential leadership qualities as having effective communication, sharing a common vision, and encouraging team-oriented approaches to problem-solving. Boothe’s (2002) findings surmised that administrators and educators must determine how to link assessment, strategic planning, and budgeting to enhance institutional effectiveness.

Additionally, two research studies conducted in community colleges in California further validate existing research. Gonzalez (2009) conducted a collaborative case study of four administrators. The findings of this study illuminated how administrators use data and collaboration to increase
awareness of inequitable educational outcomes and to create solutions to address institutional effectiveness. Gonzalez (2009) examined two community colleges, and her findings agree with leadership theorists in that, “The more skillful, stable, and trustworthy the leadership and the more open, flexible, data-informed, and collaborative the culture, the more integrated the processes on institutional effectiveness” (p. 233). Recommendations at the conclusion of many of the studies call for more research on this topic, particularly across accreditation regions (Skolits & Graybeal, 2007; Welsh et al., 2003).

**SCHOLAR PRACTITIONERS OF INSTITUTIONAL EFFECTIVENESS**

Numerous scholar practitioners actively engaged in institutional effectiveness processes shared their assessment techniques, best practices, and models for implementing institutional effectiveness. Head (2011) and Hom (2011) suggest that assessment of institutional effectiveness will not succeed without an understanding of three key principles: (a) assessment is about teaching and learning; (b) assessment is about research (data); and (c) assessment is an administrative activity. Unless administrators see their role as champions of the project, assessment activities and plans will be short-lived. Best practices dictate that leadership must extend beyond communicating the results to using the results for institutional improvements.

Volkwein (2010) proposed that any good model of institutional effectiveness should have a dual focus: one of internal inspiration for teaching and learning, and one of external pragmatism for demonstrated accountability and effectiveness. Ewell (2009) agreed and identified this duality as a tension between “assessment for accountability and assessment for improvement” (p. 5). Internal stakeholders, especially faculty, more readily engage in assessment for coursework improvements directed toward students, but they resist the need to validate the institution’s worth to outsiders. External stakeholders want data to show progress on overall institutional performance. A study conducted by Welsh et al. (2003) confirmed this finding. Leaders must be aware of this tension and attend to it in their institutional effectiveness plans.

Banta and Blaich (2011) suggested that successful assessment components are planning, implementing, improving, and sustaining—using the planning stage to define outcomes and objectives; using the next stage to conduct assessments; and lastly, implementing improvements based upon assessment results. When developing a plan, Volkwein (2010) outlined five basic questions that should guide any type of higher education assessment: “1) Are you meeting your goals? 2) Are you improving? 3) Do you meet professional standards? 4) How do you compare to others? 5) Are your efforts cost-effective?” (p. 13).

To further the comprehensive assessment plan, Manning (2011) suggested establishing an institutional effectiveness committee composed of opinion leaders from across the college. The committee reports to the president and is co-chaired by a faculty member and the institutional research officer or institutional effectiveness director, namely the chief institutional effectiveness officer, depending upon the institution’s organizational structure. The committee develops and oversees evaluative and quality processes of institutional effectiveness. Multiple sub-committees make the workload manageable by being responsible for various sub-components, such as strategic planning, academic, administrative and educational support program reviews, and student learning outcomes assessment and general education competency reviews.
Two other key factors in the institutional effectiveness process are the use of data and the integration of institutional effectiveness with planning and budget activities. Critical to any institutional effectiveness assessment is the need for reliable data for institutional research. Middaugh (2007) provided a case example in his experience at the University of Delaware. His study emphasizes gathering appropriate data, using the data in decision-making, and implementing improvements. Middaugh (2010) also stressed the importance of integrating strategic planning with assessment activities. White (2007) stated that integrating assessment activities with strategic planning increases colleges’ effectiveness of and better prepares them for their accreditation visit. Integrating these activities creates better collaboration and communication among college employees and leadership.

Nichols and Nichols (2005) offered a how-to process that includes institutional effectiveness, course outcomes assessment, student learning outcomes, and student services assessment. Many secondary schools, community colleges, colleges, and universities find this model useful when conducting across-the-board assessments. The model’s four steps are:

1. Establish a statement of institutional purpose
2. Identify internal objectives at various institutional levels
3. Assess if the outcomes and objectives are being accomplished
4. Adjust/improve the institution’s purpose, intended outcome, or activities based on assessment findings. (Nichols & Nichols, 2005, p. 25).

There are common themes in institutional effectiveness processes presented in the literature. First, accreditation agencies will not renew a college’s accreditation unless the school provides sufficient evidence that it engages in assessment processes and uses assessment results for institutional improvements. Second, accountability from stakeholders demands data-informed decisions and results that integrate strategic planning and budgetary processes (Middaugh, 2010). Third, best practices common to effective assessment models are:

1. Administrative support and direction
2. Involvement of all college stakeholders
3. Clear and understandable processes
4. Assessment at all levels—course, program, institutional and administrative, and educational support and student services
5. Understandable and useful data
6. Analysis of results that generate data-informed decision-making for institutional improvements (Kuh & Ikenberry, 2009; Serban, 2004; Suskie, 2009).
SUMMARY

Focus on institutional effectiveness policies and practices has increased and intensified by all associated with higher education. The purpose of the institutional effectiveness process includes the self-evaluation of an institution, based on its individual mission. Institutional effectiveness documents what is working efficiently and highlights needed improvements. Using the results of assessments and accountability performance measures to inform decision making is essential for higher education institutions and is a critical part of improving the institution, especially community colleges. More importantly, policy mandates from governments and accrediting agencies are rapidly intensifying the demand on institutional effectiveness processes to demonstrate improvements that advance student success and completion.
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Operation Calculus: Addressing the Achievement Gap in Mathematics
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ABSTRACT

Operation Calculus is a program designed to close the achievement gap in honors mathematics courses between African-American students and Caucasian students at Eisenhower High School. In Decatur Public School (DPS) District 61, there is a significant academic achievement disparity between African American and Caucasian students in many subject areas, most noticeably in mathematics. To address this issue, Operation Calculus provides a four-week summer instructional session to pre-teach students the math class in which they are enrolled for the upcoming academic school year. Students receive instruction in the following courses: Honors Algebra II, Pre-Calculus, and AP Calculus. In addition to summer instructional sessions, Operation Calculus provides students with continuous instruction throughout the school year, individualized tutoring, and specialized ACT prep instruction. Lastly, the program’s effectiveness can be linked to the student-teacher relationship building practices, which creates a positive impact on the current outlook of the possibility of attending an institute of higher learning.

INTRODUCTION

Operation Calculus was established July 1st 2013. Mrs. Laura Anderson and Mrs. Amy Zahm, assistant principals at Eisenhower High School, established the program. Before the pilot program was initiated, students were given a survey in which many answers indicated that honors math courses proved most difficult. Previous data revealed a large number of African-American students dropping out of honors math courses; also a large number of African-American students failing such courses. The program was devised around the concept of pre-teaching students their honors math course over the summer before the academic school year began. The conclusion was drawn that due to the pre-exposure of the course material, students will have a greater understanding of the material, which will foster a better academic performance.

After the surveys were reviewed, prospective students were identified and invited to take part in the program. The summer instructional sessions were divided into two cohorts: Honors Algebra II and Pre-Calculus. Students were to meet five days a week for three hours a day. In total, 22 students participated in the program. The most important aspect about the program’s participation is that all of the students are volunteers. Each student committed to the instructional schedule without receiving academic credit. This type of student commitment is necessary to achieve the
desired results in such programs designed to improve academic performance. The correlation between student achievement and relationship building has been well documented. In this age of high stakes testing and accountability for both students and teachers, it is important to examine the evidence to determine if these relationships are indeed a factor in raising student achievement. Advocates for the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act assert that the way to improve student achievement is to focus on test scores. However, learning is a process that involves cognitive and social psychological dimensions, and both processes should be considered if academic achievement is to be maximized (Hallinan, 2008). Regardless if a teacher-student relationship is close or fraught with conflict, that relationship seems to both contribute to, and be an indicator of, a child’s adjustment to school and academic success (Pianta & Stuhlman, 2004).

A program such as Operation Calculus can provide the necessary resources that could potentially make the difference in students attending college. Operation Calculus provides students with instruction, tutoring, academic support, and positive reinforcement that will help them gain confidence in their own academic capabilities. As our society and workforce evolves and becomes more technologically advanced, those who possess strong mathematical skills are becoming a high commodity among STEM (Science, Technology, Engineering, and Math) businesses, an infrastructure where minorities are highly underrepresented.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Algebra Project, founded by Dr. Robert P Moses, is a national organization committed to developing mathematical literacy as a tool for civic and economic inclusion for inner-city and low-income students. Drawing on almost 30 years of experience working with low-performing students in schools with high minority populations, the Algebra Project is designed to address student success in mathematics. Despite improvements in academic performance in certain areas, it appears advanced math classes are one of the most segregated places on college and university campuses in the United States (Walker 2007).

Contrary to persistent myth, it is not a discernible conclusion that minority students lack interest in math, or do not have high educational aspirations (Walker 2007). In fact, several studies document that minority students sometimes have more positive attitudes toward mathematics and higher educational aspirations than their Caucasian counterparts, especially in early years of secondary education (Goldsmith, 2004; Strutchens & Silver, 2000). Yet, students from these minority groups are less likely than Asian American and Caucasian students to complete advanced mathematics classes (National Center for Education Statistics, 2004: Teitelbaum 2003). Although schools have achieved greater parity for some college-prep courses – algebra and geometry, for example – there are still ethnicity gaps in enrollments in courses like trigonometry and calculus. These gaps have profound implications on student achievement (Teitelbaum, 2003). Despite the curricular reforms of the 1980’s, the “algebra for all” movements of the 1990’s, and the advent of No Child Left Behind in the 2000’s, there is still great variability in opportunities to learn higher mathematics in schools across the United States. Students attending predominantly minority schools still receive fewer opportunities to learn rigorous mathematics (Darling-Hammond, 2004; Tate, 1997).

Brookline High School in Brookline, MA created a similar program entitled African-American Scholars, designed to address the academic performance of minority students. A subsidiary
program within African American Scholars entitled the Calculus Project was designed to increase scholastic performance, specifically in math. The key component of the Calculus Project is to pre-teach students math courses before they entered the academic year. Operation Calculus adopted this method, however, other practices were developed during the pilot year to provide the program with a level of authenticity.

The effectiveness of programs designed to raise academic achievement is dependent on the ability of students and teachers to build positive relationships. Adults often assume that children like school due to the opportunities it offers for peer interaction. Although previous studies support that notion, research also indicates that certain teacher traits serve as strong indicators of students’ like or dislike for school (Montalvo, Mansfield, & Miller, 2007). Research by Montalvo et al. (2007) has shown that students will put forth greater effort and demonstrate a higher degree of persistence if they like their teachers. In addition, findings indicate that students attain better grades in classes taught by teachers they like (Montalvo et al., 2007). The evidence linking student-teacher relationships with student achievement has been consistent across grade levels. Given these findings, it is important for all students and teachers to have equal access to establishing positive relationships with their teachers.

**METHODOLDY**

The most common question asked about Operation Calculus is why does it only target African-American students? This decision was based on the performance data of the student body. All data indicated that there is a large disparity in the academic performance between African-American and Caucasian students. For example, if the data showed that female students displayed a low academic performance in mathematics, the program would target females.

Operation Calculus was developed around a similar project designed by Brookline High School. Academic evaluation of the student body revealed similar data with poor mathematical performances amongst minority students. The program Brookline High School instituted focused on pre-teaching math courses to students. Operation Calculus decided to take its efforts a few steps further by continuing its pre-teaching throughout the school year, along with an intensive tutoring schedule, and specialized ACT prep courses under the direction of the Huntington Learning Institute.

In the process of constructing the curriculum of Operation Calculus, a list of goals was formulated to measure its success. After devising the program, the main goals were as follows: to show improvement in analytical math skills during the pre-teaching instructional sessions during the summer, increase the retention rate for African-American students enrolled in honors math courses, decrease the number of African-American student failures in honors math courses, increase the number of African-American students to meet/exceed the state standards of the PSAE/ACT exams, increase the number of African-American students taking Advanced Placement Calculus, and increase the number of African American students eligible to be inducted into the National Honor Society. During the pilot year, Operation Calculus has successfully met and exceeded the goals outlined in its initial proposal. Eisenhower High School is currently awaiting the results of the PSAE/ACT exams.
In order to truly enhance a student’s academic experience, he or she must be challenged. Without the daily challenge and constant stimulation, students become lackadaisical about the progress of their education. Operation Calculus provides students the opportunity to take Advanced Placement Calculus in their senior year, which can prove to be the most challenging class in any high school curriculum. In addition, Operation Calculus can also provide students with the necessary preparation and means of self-confidence to successfully complete AP Calculus. Given the early success of the program’s pilot year, others within the student body recognize the commitment to education that members of Operation Calculus continue to display. As other students work with members of Operation Calculus, the improved positive attitude towards education becomes infectious, therefore, improving the overall academic performance of the student body, and increasing the number of college-bound students.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the organization and initiation of Operation Calculus, African-American and disadvantaged students were invited to take part in the program. Over the past 10 years, Eisenhower High School has seen a significant academic achievement disparity between African-American and Caucasian students. This gap is the widest in mathematics. 2012-13 course enrollment data reflects that 49 African-American students dropped an honors math class, 42 failed during the first semester, and 21 during second semester. In 2013, 9% of African-American students met or exceeded state requirements on the Prairie State Achievement Exam. These statistics are dramatically worse than those of Caucasian classmates.

During the summer pre-teaching instructional sessions, students were given a pre-test on the first day and a post-test on the last day. This was done to measure the growth of retained knowledge over the course of the instructional sessions. Divided into two cohorts, the Algebra II cohort on average improved 18% on the post-examination. The Pre-Calculus cohort on average improved 22.8%. Every student member of the Operation Calculus program showed improvement from the pre-test to the post-test.

In the methodology section are the outlined goals of the Operation Calculus program. After the first semester of the 2013-14 school year, Operation Calculus is on pace to meet and exceed every goal.

1. GOAL: Less than 29% of African-American Students will fail 1st semester honors math course.
   RESULT: 9% of African-American students failed their honors math course.

2. GOAL: Less than 15% of Operation Calculus students will fail 1st semester honors math course.
   RESULT: 0% of Operation Calculus students failed their honors math course.

3. GOAL: Less than 39% of African-American students will drop 2013-14 honors math course.
   RESULT: 7% of African-American students dropped an honors math course.
4. **GOAL:** Less than 15% of Operation Calculus students will drop 2013-14 honors math course.
   RESULT: 0% of Operation Calculus students dropped an honors math course. *NOTE: four Operation Calculus students are taking two honors math courses to put them on track to take Advanced Placement Calculus during their senior year.

5. **GOAL:** Increase the number of African-American students taking advanced math courses (Pre-Calculus and Advanced Placement Calculus).

RESULTS: **Pre Calculus Enrollment:**

2012-13 – 15 African-American Students

2013-14 – 12 African-American Students

2014-15 – 19 African American Students scheduled

**AP Calculus Enrollment:**

2012-13 – 2 African American Students

2013-14 – 4 African American Students

2014-15 – 9 African-American Students scheduled

**CONCLUSION**

In accordance with DPS district, this program will improve the culture amongst its students, during and outside of school. It will also create a climate that fosters achievement through small group discussions that are centered on topics such as: STEM careers, education, college, and society. Through the Operation Calculus program the community will be improved. The program will support, promote, celebrate, and foster an environment of high achievement and expectations. When students have a positive teacher-student relationship, they adjust to school more easily, view school as a positive experience, exhibit fewer behavior difficulties, display better social skills, and demonstrate higher academic achievement (Buysse et al., 2009). They are also more active participants in class, express a greater interest in college, and maintain higher grade point averages (Hallinan, 2008). Students will have the drive to stay in school and achieve to their highest potential because of the ongoing support from peers and staff members. Furthermore, high achieving students are better prepared to be successful in post-secondary education, and will become more active and productive citizens in the community.
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