CURRENT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES UTILIZED BY

TWO-YEAR INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER

EDUCATION TO IDENTIFY

ACADEMIC ABILITIES OF

ENTERING STUDENTS

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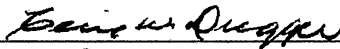the Degree of
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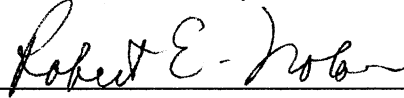December, 1991

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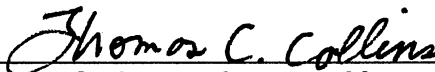ACADEMIC ABILITIES OF

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

Since the 1980's two-year institutions of higher education with
open door admission policies have been America's major vehicle for
the advancement of social justice. The role of the two-year
institutions of higher education has been, and will continue to be,
to expand educational opportunities for the poor, minorities, and
other upwardly mobile working people. Two-year institutions with
open door admission policies have made higher education available to
many who would have been excluded because of financial limitations,
geographic location, or academic under-preparation.

The mission of the two-year institution has changed and been
refined over the years. The current mission of the open door two-
year institutions of higher education encompasses the following
areas: college transfer programs, technical and occupational
programs, community or continuing education, student services, and
compensatory or remedial education.

On the surface, the concept of an open door two-year
institution intended to help fulfill dreams of United States
citizens is exciting! Unfortunately, a simple commitment to
nonselective admissions has resulted in much criticism of the
fulfillment of the community college mission.

As practitioners, college administrators realize that access
through the open door two-year institution of higher education

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without comprehensive student assessment and developmental

programming is counter productive to the stated mission of providing

remedial education and opportunity for student success according to

Parnell (1990). Consequently, administrators in two-year

institutions of higher education concede that opening the door is

not enough. Access must become a process which utilizes all aspects

of the institution's Student Service Program. The term "holistic

approach" has been adopted by two-year institutions of higher

education to describe the process used to encompass all phases of

the Student Services Program to help students succeed after

enrolling.

Adopting this holistic approach to open access has resulted in

two-year institutions of higher education making new commitments to

several areas of student services. Nationally, assessment services

have been given a higher priority (American Association of Community

and Junior Colleges, 1987; Hutchings, 1989). Developmental classes

are being evaluated and strengthened, and academic support services

are being initiated with greater concern for the student.

Nevertheless, if this holistic approach is to have a positive impact

on improving instruction and academic programs, enhancing student

success rate, and improving opportunities for students, assessment

must become an integral and ongoing part of two-year institutions of

higher education.

Assessment is a broad term used to describe testing for a

variety of purposes. One type of assessment is "testing for

admission." Since most two-year institutions have open door

policies, this type of assessment generally does not apply to them.

A second type of assessment is testing for appropriate class placement. In this type, the students' academic abilities are identified after he or she is admitted to the institution, according to Abraham (1987). If academic weaknesses are discovered and remedial work is necessary, the work can be done before the student enrolls in college-level classes (Abraham, 1987). Rose State College in Midwest City, Oklahoma took an exceptional step when it recently initiated a mandatory student assessment program for entering students. Rose State administrators felt that early identification of academic deficiencies and their early remediation would increase its retention rate and enable more students to reach their educational and personal goals.

A third type of student assessment is outcome assessment. Its purpose is to determine what effect an educational institution has had upon its students (Miller, 1988). Outcome assessment takes on a variety of forms and is usually administered at various periods during a student's college years. Some measure acquisition of basic skills, reading, writing, and computation ability. Others take a "value added" form which is an approach that measures achievement in academic areas and in life skills. Proponents of outcome assessment say that this type of evaluation gives students, faculty, and administrators a better idea of how well everyone is doing in the process of education. Also, outcome assessment provides guidelines for improvement and makes institutions more accountable for the quality of education they provide (Miller, 1988).

A comprehensive student assessment program is more than the testing of basic skills. It involves the assessment of motivational levels, study skills, background, past performance, educational readiness and self-concept. Regardless of the type of assessment used, two-year institutions of higher education must be able to provide the necessary remediation.

The term "developmental education" is used in postsecondary institutions to describe programs that teach underprepared students. These programs usually include remedial classes in reading, English, and math that are designed to meet students at their own academic levels and to bring them up to a level that would enable them to enter college level classes. It is through the developmental education program that two-year institutions of higher education maintain standards of academic excellence and enable students to ultimately be successful.

Many two-year students do not have role models at home who can tell them what to expect in college and how to prepare for the experience (Monroe, 1973). Consequently, aggressive student development programs have been put in place. Their purpose is to help non-traditional students understand their responsibilities as college students and to provide basic information concerning college attendance. Developmental programs also help students to identify their educational goals and provide support and encouragement for students.

Effective student development programs work closely with both students and instructors. Cooperation between students and

instructors is necessary to ensure that students are progressing satisfactorily and to provide academic support services such as tutoring and study skill instruction when necessary.

Background for the Study

Research has indicated that a large percentage of students at two-year institutions of higher education drop out before they graduate (Noel, Levitz, Saluri, and Associates, 1985). In fact, a majority of students entering two-year institutions of higher education fail to graduate. Of the nearly 2.8 million students who enrolled in 1986 in higher education for the first time, approximately 1.6 million were expected to leave their first institution without receiving a degree (Tinto, 1987). The two-year institution of higher education is sometimes referred to as a revolving door, rather than an open door, institution. A number of students enter two-year institutions academically unprepared for the demands of college work. Consequently, student retention becomes an endless struggle for the two-year institution of higher education. Academically unprepared students can severely hamper retention efforts unless appropriate assessment of student academic abilities is conducted at the time the student matriculates (Astin, 1975).

Statement of the Problem

The problem which gave rise to this study was that no consistent approach to assess academic abilities of entering applicants was used by two-year institutions of higher education

(Cohen and Brawer, 1982).

According to Cohen and Brawer (1982), two-year institutions of higher education are free to admit students regardless of where they place on entrance examinations. Due to the open door policy, and because each institution sets its own standards, assessment of the entering applicant's academic abilities appears to be arbitrary.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to identify the current procedures utilized to assess the academic abilities of entering students at public two-year institutions of higher education in the southern United States. This was accomplished through a review of current research literature and by surveying selected two-year institutions of higher education concerning their student assessment procedures.

Objectives

The following are the research objectives of this study:

1. To describe how various two-year institutions of higher education assess the academic ability of entering students.

2. To establish whether student assessment is voluntary or mandatory for entering applicants.

3. To describe the assessment staff's perception of the effectiveness of their assessment program.

4. To identify the kinds of remedial programs two-year institutions of higher education provide for entering students

identified as academically underprepared.

Need for the Study

In an open door institution the need for assessment is acute (Cohen and Brawer, 1987). Without assessment and support services, two-year colleges often make a mockery of the open-door concept (American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1987). The two-year institutions have no assurance that their students possess even the most rudimentary academic skills. Research indicates that nearly 50 percent of the students at two-year institutions drop out before they graduate (Tinto, 1987).

To contend with student attrition, a Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) report (1987) recommended that states require their higher education institutions to identify and implement statewide minimum standards and assessments for all students in courses that earn credit toward the baccalaureate degree.

Struggling with retention problems has given rise to a genuine interest in student assessment at two-year institutions of higher education according to Cohen and Brawer (1982). In the past, two-year institutions of higher education saw little value in student assessment (Rounds, 1984). This attitude prevailed because of the open door policy and virtually unrestricted admission criteria. If two-year institutions performed appropriate assessment of all entering students, then low ability students would be identified and directed into remedial classes. Consequently, retention efforts and student success rates, as well as institutional goals, could

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improve. However, channeling low ability students into remedial

classes has proven to be a difficult task for the two-year

institutions of higher education. Low ability students, without a

clear understanding of the demands of college curriculum, are

difficult to convince that remedial work is necessary (Roueche,

1968). Appropriately assessing a student's academic ability may

assist in justifying the need for remedial work, improving

the student's chances of reaching his or her educational and

personal goals.

Definitions of Terms

The following definitions are used in this study to clarify

terms.

<u>Academic Placement:</u> The process of deciding whether students

already admitted to college have skills and knowledge necessary to

begin courses that count toward an undergraduate degree.

<u>Academically Underprepared Students:</u> Those students with

distinctive characteristics who are perceived by the academic

community to be academically disadvantaged in contention with the

vast majority of students who enter college (Moore, 1976 and

Kraetsch, 1980).

<u>Community College:</u> A term synonymous with the two-year college

and junior college but not the two-year institution of higher

education. The term means an institution of higher education

accredited by a state agency to offer the Associate of Arts degree,

the Associate in Science degree, or the Associate in Applied Science

degree (Cohen and Brawer, 1982). The mission of the two-year institution of higher education encompasses the following areas: college transfer programs, technical and occupational programs, community or continuing education, student services, and compensatory or remedial education.

Current Analysis: A simple though laborious method of studying communications in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner for the purpose of measuring variables (Kerlinger, 1964).

Developmental/Remedial Programs: Programs in basic reading, writing, and mathematics, usually designed to teach underprepared students.

Guidance Information System (GIS): A computerized directory of two-year institutions of higher education which provides names, addresses, enrollment size and other demographic information on two-year institutions of higher education within the United States.

Outcome Assessment: Assessment practices characterized by longitudinal ("pretest, posttest") design, in which a group of students is tested with the same or comparable measures at different times, thereby providing measures of growth and change over time (Jacobi, Astin, and Ayala, 1987).

Open Door: A term referring to the policy of two-year institutions of higher education whereby high school graduates, adults with general equivalency diplomas (GED), and those 18 years of age or older are admitted.

Southern Regional Education Board (SREB): A consortium of 15 states comprised of Alabama, Arkansas, Florida, Georgia, Kentucky,

Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, North Carolina, Oklahoma, South Carolina, Tennessee, Texas, Virginia, and West Virginia. The SREB's primary function is to make recommendations for the improvement of educational practices at two-year institutions of higher education within its region.

<u>Two-Year</u> <u>Institution</u> <u>of</u> <u>Higher</u> <u>Education:</u> Any post-secondary institution accredited to award the associate in arts or science as its highest degree. Although remedial level courses and community service classes are offered, most instruction is primarily collegiate grade and structured to parallel courses offered in the first two years by senior institutions (Cohen and Brawer, 1982).

Limitations

This study was limited in the following ways:

1. It was limited to the student assessment practices of two-year institutions of higher education in the SREB Consortium with enrollments of 10,000 or fewer.

2. The study was also limited by the accuracy of materials involved, and the forms completed and returned.

3. Participants in this study were limited to those with a broad knowledge of community college student assessment programs and/or a knowledge of the educational needs of low ability students.

Assumptions

The following were assumptions related to this study:

1. Due to the tremendous push for accountability, student assessment will become an integral part of two-year institutions of higher education.

2. Two-year institutions of higher education are not currently performing effective student assessment practices.

Organization of the Study

Chapter I provides background information related to the study. It also presents the statement of the problem, purpose of the study, objectives, need for the study, definitions of terms, limitations of the study, assumptions, and the organization of the study. The review of literature is contained in Chapter II. Chapter III deals with methodology and includes an introduction, instrumentation, population, sampling, and data collection. An analysis of data and results are reported in Chapter IV. Chapter V is composed of the summary, conclusions, and recommendations for practice and for further research.

CHAPTER II

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

Since the "open door" two-year institution of higher
education attracts such a highly diverse student population,
assessment of a student's academic abilities has become a paramount
issue. It has been estimated that more than half of the students
entering two-year institutions of higher education need additional
course work in preparation for college level classes (Moore and
Carpenter, 1985; Thurston, 1962). As many as 80 percent of incoming
students need additional preparation in mathematics. Thornton
(1972) found assessment and guidance useful in helping entering
students to know, to accept, and to respect his or her abilities, so
that they might match them with realistic educational and
occupational goals. The varied skill levels of this population,
coupled with the high rate of documents adult illiteracy in the
United States, has caused the two-year institution of higher
education to initiate developmental educational strategies designed
to increase the probability of student success (Cohen and Brawer,
1982).

The literature (American Association of Community and Junior
Colleges, 1987) confirms that student assessment has become a high
priority within two-year institutions of higher education. Now that

access has been achieved through open door admission, two-year institutions of higher education are being challenged by state legislative bodies, accrediting agencies and other outside groups to verify that they are doing a good job of assisting students in reaching their educational objectives. However, when asked to provide proof of this claim, they are hard pressed to do so (Miller, 1988; McLeod and Carter, 1986).

An outspoken critic of the two-year institution of higher education asserts that students who attend these colleges receive a "second best" education (Zwerling, 1976). Zwerling suggests that the American two-year institution of higher education is not a vehicle for opportunity but a social filter which provides a "cooling out process" so that aspirations of students who want to be upwardly mobile are brought down to a "realistic level." Other critics of the open door admission policy charge that open assess and excellence cannot coexist in the same institution. They argue that excellence can be achieved only by limiting access.

Two year college leaders are award of this "elitist" attitude and are striving to prove that quality education can be offered in an open door admission setting providing that appropriate assessment is conducted upon student matriculation.

Studies (Rounds and Anderson, 1985; Roueche, Baker, and Roueche, 1984; Friedlander, 1981) have shown that accurate assessment and placement is a fundamental strategy for handling the dilemma of underprepared students. Consequently, strong and effective student assessment programs are the vehicle through which

two-year institutions of higher education have chosen to silence their critics. Two-year college administrators maintain that comprehensive student assessment programs provide the means for fulfilling the mission of accepting low ability students, and prescribing remedial education to assist them in reaching their educational goals (American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1987).

Two-year institutions of higher education must become more deeply involved in the process of evaluating their assessment practices, especially with regard to entering students. This means placing greater emphasis on diagnosing deficiencies and prescribing corrective measures for entering applicants to enhance learning and increase student success rate. Student assessment should be used as an instrument to measure academic ability and to ensure appropriate evaluation of the student's progress, but never as a tool for limiting or denying access (American Association of Community and Junior Colleges, 1987).

Early Development of Assessment

Aptitude tests have been used in college admission and placement during most of this century, although their roots may be traced much further back in our educational history. They have been developed and administered by various agencies for widely varying purposes with the common goal of seeking to measure a student's aptitude and preparedness for college.

Modern admission testing dates from 1900, when the College Entrance Examination Board (CEEB) was founded as a member association by a small number of colleges, universities and secondary schools who were concerned about the multiplicity of entrance examinations and the diversity of school curricula (Eckland, 1982). During the first quarter of this century, the College Board administered, on a national basic, a series of standardized essay examinations covering various subjects. The tests were primarily used in the admission process of private eastern colleges, while public institutions in the midwest and other regions tended to follow an admission process governed by high school diploma or certificate. In 1926, the College Board introduced a new multiple-choice Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) developed by Carl Brigham of Princeton University. The SAT was supplementary to the essay test and was used initially in the selection of scholarship candidates from schools not preparing students for the essay examination.

Multiple choice aptitude tests, developed by the College Board in cooperation with the American Council on Education, came into regular use as part of the admission process during World War II (1942) and subsequently came to be used, not only in selection but also increasingly for placement (Eckland, 1982).

During the middle 1950s, the National Merit Scholarship Corporation was begun with the purpose of identifying high school students who would merit special commendation and economic incentives. It used a special scholarship qualifying test as its

initial screening device. At about the same time, the College Board introduced the Preliminary Scholastic Aptitude Test (PSAT) as an instrument for use in the guidance and counseling of pre-college students. In 1971, the PSAT was combined with the National Merit test to become the PSAT/NMSQT, which now serves purposes of both early guidance and scholarship screening.

During late 1959, still another national pre-college testing program was introduced with the founding of the American College Testing Program (ACT) in Iowa City. The ACT Assessment Battery serves essentially the same functions as the SAT and finds its heaviest use in the midwest.

Most students who go to college today take one or more of these tests. The largest increase in the number of students taking aptitude tests occurred in the 1950s and 1960s. Those two decades were a period when colleges were expanding very rapidly, due both to an increasing proportion of students in each age cohort planning to go to college and, as a result of the post-war baby boom, to the increasing size of each cohort in absolute numbers. Most of the open door colleges of the 1940s could not expand rapidly enough to admit everyone who applied. An acceptable means had to be developed for rejection of some applicants without penalizing those from underprivileged backgrounds (such as raising tuition fees). The use of test scores, along with high school grades, was widely defended as being the only reasonable and fair procedure for admitting as well as determining the academic abilities of entering students.

Functions of Assessment Testing at

Two-year Institutions

One of the functions of student assessment at two-year institutions is academic placement (Cohen and Brawer, 1987). Academic placement is the process of deciding whether students already have the skills and knowledge necessary to begin courses that count toward an undergraduate degree. If they do, the entering students are placed in degree credit courses. If they do not have these skills and knowledge, the students are placed in remedial/developmental courses.

Too often, "admission" and "placement" are used interchangeably. Placement occurs after admission. Students may be admitted, yet lack the skills needed to perform college level work. As a result, remedial work is required. This occurs in open door institutions as might be expected and also in institutions that have entry standards. Obviously, in institutions which have entrance examinations, students who are admitted are likely to have the necessary skills to be placed in degree credit courses.

A second function of student assessment is to determine the academic skill levels of entering students. No consistent levels of skill in reading, writing, and mathematics have been established at two-year institutions of higher education to begin college level courses.

Assessment standards used by two-year institutions of higher education to place students within college level or remedial work vary widely. An April, 1987 Southern Regional Education Board

(SREB) study of its 15 member states found that entry level placement standards for reading, writing and mathematics varied from as low as the first percentile to as high as the 94th percentile. If such variances exist among states, this raises a concern about the variations in college level placement standards among institutions within a given state. Abraham (1986) analyzed nationally normed placement tests used by various SREB institutions to ascertain reading, writing and mathematic ability. The results clearly showed the lack of consensus concerning placement standards and cut-off scores within the region. Abraham's study further revealed that not only is it unclear where the "floor" or "cut-off" level needed to begin college work is set, but that the scores are so low as to render themselves virtually meaningless in establishing standards and improving the quality of undergraduate education.

Current Status of Assessment at
Two-Year Institutions

Although assessment has just recently become important at two-year institutions of higher education, student assessment is not a transitory reform movement which may fade away with a new administration or regime. Student assessment in one form or another has been part of higher education for years and will continue as long as there is a need to know something about the student's abilities and the effectiveness of what is being taught. The central issue is not why assessment is done, but rather how to

assure that the student assessment process is valid, according to
Fife (cited in Jacobi, Astin, and Ayala, 1987). Fife further
contended that the validity of an assessment process can be
determined only if the institutions have established in advance what
it is the college was attempting to assess (i.e. admission
requirement, academic abilities, outcomes).

Practioners at two-year institution of higher education
at contend that they are meeting the challenges being presented to
them by social, economic, and educational forces of our society.
Clearly, these institutions are providing education at reasonable
cost in locations that are accessible to many. Yet research
(Rounds, 1984) reveals that much improvement can still be made in
the area of student assessment.

According to the American Association of Community and Junior
Colleges (1987), to allow academically underprepared students to
enter classes for which they are not ready may close the door to
student success and block the road to achievement of both
institutional and student educational objectives. On the other
hand, an effective student assessment program promotes educational
excellence, access, and the efficient use of institutional
resources.

Rounds (1984) reviewed several surveys of testing practices at
two-year institutions of higher education and found that in the
early 1970s one-third of the institutions had no formal student
assessment procedure. Testing was not mandated by many of the other
institutions. Students might be advised to take tests at entry if

they wanted to be assisted in selecting courses to enter.

Larger two-year institutions like Miami-Dade Community College and San Diego Community College, with enrollments over 10,000, do a somewhat better job of student assessment than do smaller institutions (Cohen and Brawer, 1987). Nevertheless, large or small institutions must come to the realization that comprehensive student assessment programs are vital to their success and ultimate acceptance as quality educational institutions, for it is through comprehensive student assessment practices that the two-year institution of higher education maintains credibility and ensures that standards are not jeopardized.

Research such as Cross (1976), Roueche and Snow (1977), and Lavin and Silberstein (1981) have noted the increased attention that colleges devoted to determining entering student needs during the 1970s. Colleges were less likely to be satisfied with gross measures of previous success like high school rank and they tried to discriminate among various student needs. While ACT and SAT test scores were still used at some two-year institutions of higher education for admission and placement, many institutions employed tests in the specific discipline to validate the results of the standardized tests in writing, reading and mathematics. Occasionally, such tests were administered in the natural and social sciences as well. More and more institutions, dissatisfied with standardized tests, developed tests of their own, according to Deegan, Tillery and Associates (1985). In fact, Roueche and Snow (1977) discovered that 95 percent of community colleges use locally

developed placement tests in at least one area. Later research

conducted by Ribaudo, Roellig, and Lederman (1982) noted that 75

percent of their respondents relied heavily on local tests as

the major determinants for assessing academic ability and remedial

placement. While increased interest in student assessment has come

about at smaller two-year institutions of higher education,

comprehensive assessment programs are yet to be employed on a larger

scale at these institutions.

Although comprehensive student assessment programs have been

slow in developing, two primary forces have provided the current

thrust to propel two-year institutions of higher education toward

stronger student assessment practices. These two forces are

"limited funds" and "accountability." All postsecondary

institutions are in greater competition for fewer high school

graduates in a time of stabilized funding levels. An increasing

proportion of students view community colleges as serving primarily

their own communities, where students can learn skills to provide

them with economic and social mobility (Dziech, 1986). At the same

time, a persistent contingent of students is enrolled because it is

a less expensive segment of credits toward a baccalaureate degree.

The current concern for accountability is matter of high

interest among most accrediting agencies and state legislatures

across the country. Although the four year colleges and

universities have been the primary target of this concern for

accountability, the two-year institution of higher education are

drawing increasing attention. Academicians in both universities and

two-year colleges are expressing growing concerns for educational quality, the hallmark of acountability according to Lane and Midkiff (1988).

Student assessment has come to the forefront of student service programs at two-year institutions of higher education. Much rhetoric is heard about the student's abilities and performance as a result of the current emphasis on accountability. Two fundamental approaches to student assessment permeate the literature. Each approach is classified as "outcomes assessment," a term used in postsecondary institutions to describe assessment practices characterized by longitudinal design, in which a group of students is tested with the same or comparable measure at different times, thereby providing measures of growth and change over time (Jacobi, Astin, and Ayala, 1987).

The first approach measures competency, what the students know after they have received their education. More precisely, a competency based assessment approach assists in determining if the students' education enables him or her to master a given set of skills. The second approach measures value-added, the change in knowledge or development that has occurred as a result of having received their education. The value-added approach specifically seeks to ascertain the extent one's schooling added knowledge to what the student already knew. Regrettably, most smaller two-year institutions of higher education do not yet place sufficient priority on the outcome assessment approach in order to adequately fund and staff such operations, contend Lane and Midkiff (1988).

These colleges tend to remain content with student assessment for placement purposes. Fortunately, a few of the larger two-year institutions of higher education have begun to move in the direction of comprehensive student assessment practices which include placement testing as well as outcome assessment.

Studies identified a high correlation between student attitudes abut themselves and subsequent success in college (Astin, 1975; Clarke and Ammons, 1970). Astin noted that only 22 percent drop out for poor academic performances. Currently two-year institutions of higher education devote more time to assessing students' affective as well as cognitive needs. Two-year institutions of higher education in particular have recognized that students who enter college with a previous record of failure are unlikely to enter their institutions glowing with academic confidence. To combat the student's lack of confidence, Cross (1976) noted the trend toward developmental programs for the underprepared student that included affective and social as well as educational components. Effective student assessment programs measures both affective and cognitive needs of the student. Unfortunately, studies (Lane and Midkiff, 1988) indicate that most two-year institutions of higher education currently concentrate most of their efforts only on the cognitive needs of students. There is increased attention given to student assessment practices of the two-year institution of higher education.

Summary

Surveys may indicate that a majority of college administrators favor student assessment. However, almost as large a group fears its use by external authorities and worries that it may narrow curricula and homogenize instruction (Ewell, 1987). The gap between opinion and action is also striking. More than 50 percent of college administrators support assessing student abilities, but only 15 percent report during anything about it (Ewell, 1987). Furthermore, in the more complex area of "value-added" assessment, some 65 percent support the concept, but less than ten percent are conducting value-added programs, contends Ewell (1987).

The literature clearly indicates that student assessment will continue. To date, the important question is not whether institutions will do student assessment but whether the data collected will have any significant connection to institutional and instructional goals and ultimately produce real improvements in our system of higher education (Spangehl, 1987).

CHAPTER III

METHODOLOGY

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the current
procedures utilized to assess the academic abilities of entering
students at public two-year institutions of higher education in the
southern United States. To achieve this purpose, the survey
technique utilizing a questionnaire was chosen as the method to
collect data and report findings among the various institutions.
This method was selected because it permitted the researcher to
gather data from a large and geographically dispersed population in
a limited period of time. According to Zemke and Kramlinger (1986),
this technique has been demonstrated to be useful and reliable in
educational planning. It is effective in obtaining current data
when administered to appropriate and knowledgeable participants.
When carefully conceived and conducted, the survey can expedite the
task of tabulating and reporting results. Ideally, it yields
information about needs, potential problems, and employee
perceptions, attitudes, and current practices (Zemke and Kramlinger,
1986). Appendix A presents the time schedule used for developing
the instrument, collecting and analyzing the data, and reporting the
findings.

Instrumentation

A two-page questionnaire was developed to describe the current student assessment practices at two-year institutions of higher education. Questions were developed from information gathered during the review of the literature. Each survey question was carefully constructed to ensure that all items on the instrument related to one or more of the research objectives (Table I).

TABLE I

SURVEY QUESTIONS RELATING TO ASSESSING ACADEMIC ABILITY

Item	Relates to	Research Objective
1, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, 10, 11, 12, 13	1	To describe how various two-year institutions of higher education assess academic ability of entering students

Survey questions which sought to determine whether the institution's assessment practice was voluntary or mandatory is depicted in Table II.

TABLE II

SURVEY QUESTIONS RELATING TO MANDATORY OR VOLUNTARY ASSESSMENT

Item	Relates to	Research Objective
2, 3	2	To establish whether assessment is voluntary or mandatory for entering students.

Survey items which were designed to ascertain the assessment staff's perception of the effectiveness of their assessment practice is presented in Table III.

TABLE III

SURVEY QUESTIONS RELATING TO PERCEPTIONS OF PROGRAM
EFFECTIVENESS BY ASSESSMENT STAFF

Item	Relates to	Research Objective
14, 16, 18, 19, 20, 21, 22, 23, 24, 25	3	To describe the assessment staff's perception of the effectiveness of their assessment practice.

Table IV presents survey questions designed to identify the kinds of remedial programs two-year institutions of higher education provide for entering students identified as academically underprepared.

TABLE IV

SURVEY QUESTIONS RELATING TO KINDS OF
REMEDIAL PROGRAMS OFFERED

Item	Relates to	Research Objective
3, 17, 15	4	To identify the kinds of remedial programs two-year institutions provide for entering students identified as academically underprepared.

In order to establish clarity and content validity, the instrument was reviewed on October 11, 1990 by professional assessment testing practitioners employed at three Oklahoma two-year institutions of higher education (See Appendix B for a list of the initial institutions). The review resulted in two minor changes in the instrument format and two changes in subject verb agreement. In order to develop face validity for the instrument, and to measure reliability and similarity of response, the questionnaire was reviewed again on January 19, 1991. Fifteen two-year institutions

of higher education were randomly selected and mailed survey instruments. The director of assessment from each state within the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Consortium was sent an instrument and asked to complete and critique the survey and to make suggestions to improve the design of the instrument (See Appendix C for a list of target institutions used in the review).

Eight surveys were returned with no suggestions for improvement of the instrument. All 18 two-year institutions of higher education used in the review process (three in the initial and 15 in the subsequent target population) were considered contaminated due to their exposure to the instrument, so they were not included in the subsequent research sampling process.

Population

The total population in this study consisted of 518 public two-year institutions of higher education with enrollments of 10,000 or less. The entire 518 two-year institutions were selected from a listing in the Guidance Information System (GIS) Directory for all two-year institutions of higher education within the SREB Consortium, 1990. GIS is a computerized directory which provides names, addresses, and other demographic information on two-year institutions within the United States.

Since 18 of the institutions from the original population were used in the pilot test, and thereby contaminated, the total number of institutions in the population was reduced to 500.

Sampling

Since the expected rate of occurrence of the variables in question was unknown, and since there were several variables, such as "assessment testing requirements" and "prerequisites for course placement," the most conservative estimated rate of occurrence of 50 percent was selected.

TABLE V

LAKNER MODEL FOR EXPECTED RATE OF OCCURRENCE IN THE POPULATION

Population Size	5% or 95%	10% or 90%	20% or 80%	30% or 70%	40% or 60%	50% or 50%
500	64	108	165	196	213	217
1,000	68	121	198	244	262	278
1,500	70	126	211	269	297	306
2,000	70	130	219	278	312	322
2,500	71	131	224	286	322	333
10,000	72	136	240	313	356	370
50,000	72	137	245	321	367	381
100,000 and over	73	138	246	322	369	348

Sample size for Reliability of + or − 5 at the 95% Confidence Level.

The sample size needed to estimate the value of a population paremeter or set of population parameters with a given level of precision is dependent upon several factors, according to Cochran (1979). The basic formula is as follows:

$$n = \frac{p\ (1-P)}{(s.e.p)^2}$$

where n = the size of the sample

p = the anticipated proportion in the population of the specific characteristic

s.e. = the desired standard error of the proportions.

If the determined sample size forms a substantial fraction of the population, a correction factor for this, the finite population correction (FPC), is also required. Cochran's formula for the FPC is as follows:

$$n' = \frac{n}{1 + (n/N)}$$

where n' = the sample size from FPC,

n = the size of the sample calculated using the first formula, and

N = the size of the population.

A sample precision of + or - 5 percent at the 95 percent confidence level was selected as appropriate. That is to say, the researcher is 95 percent confident that the responses of the sample represent those of the population within a band of + or - 5 percent. The 95 percent confidence limit corresponds to 1.96 standard errors

of measurement on either side of the population value. The sample
size calculations are as follows:

$$n = \frac{p\ (1-p)}{(s.e.p.)^2}$$

$$n = \frac{.50\ (1 - .50)}{(.50/1.96)^2}$$

$$n = 384$$

Since 384 represents a substantial proportion of the population
of 500, the FPC was used as follows:

$$n' = \frac{n}{1 + (n/N)}$$

$$n' = \frac{384}{1 + (384/500)}$$

$$n' = 217$$

Consequently, a sample size of 217 was used. This gives the
researcher the ability to say that he is 95 percent certain that the
information obtained from the sample is representative within + or
-5 percent of the population. If a smaller sample had been desired,
it would have been necessary to increase or decrease the expected
rate of occurrence of 50 percent.

Of the 500 institutions within the population, 80 percent or 400 were randomly selected for sampling. Randomization was achieved by drawing the names of institutions from a hat that contained the entire list of 500 institutions. All institutions were from the 15 member states which comprise the SREB Consortium.

Collection of Data

The survey technique was used to collect data from the participants in this study.

Responses of the participants were solicited through the use of carefully prepared questionnaire. The questionnaire was sent with a cover letter to all participants explaining how they were selected and inviting them to participate in the study. The cover letter was developed and piloted utilizing the same procedure as the questionnaire (See Appendix D). The questionnaire included instructions to the participants, asking them to answer all items on the survey and to use the symbol UNK for all unknown answers (See Appendix E).

The questionnaire was designed to acquire data about the existence of a formal student assessment program at the institution and the data of its establishment. the entity requesting the assessment program, like an accrediting agency, the state legislature, or the institutional administration, was to be identified. All participants surveyed were asked to list the principle factors by which they recognized or measured the effectiveness of their student assessment practices.

The questionnaire was designed to solicit the respondents' personal perceptions of the effectiveness of the student assessment program at their institutions and to identify the kinds of remedial programs provided for entering applicants.

The questionnaire further sought to ascertain the various tests utilized by two-year institutions of higher education in assessing academic ability of entering students and to establish whether student assessment was voluntary or mandatory for entering applicants. On February 11, 1991, 400 questionnaires were mailed to participants asking them to complete the instrument and return it in the self addressed, stamped envelope which was provided by February 20, 1991. On February 21, 1991, follow-up letters were mailed to non-respondents (See Appendix F). Two hundred forty completed surveys were returned. This represented a 60 percent response rate.

Summary

Because of the size of the population involved in this study, the survey technique utilizing a questionnaire was chosen as the method to collect data from among the various institutions. A two-page questionnaire was developed to identify the current assessment practices at two-year institutions of higher education. The questionnaire was jury tested utilizing professional assessment testing practitioners employed at various two-year institutions of higher education within the target population.

Each survey question was carefully constructed to ensure that the 11 items on the instrument related to one or more of the

research objectives.

    Survey questionnaires were mailed to 400 two-year institutions of higher education within the SREB Consortium. Two hundred forty were completed and returned for a 60 percent response rate.

CHAPTER IV

ANALYSIS OF DATA

Introduction

The purpose of this study was to identify the current

procedures utilized to assess the academic abilities of entering

students at public two-year institutions of higher education in the

southern United States.

The information was collected and responses of the participants

were hand scored. Every response for each question was treated as

a single answer. More specifically, each Yes, No, or UNK response

was tabulated and divided by the total number of responses to obtain

percentages. All percentages were rounded to the nearest whole

number. Several responses were cross tabulated to determine if

patterns existed among items. Categories for written responses were

established utilizing the process of content analysis. Content

analysis is a simple, though laborious, method of studying

communications in a systematic, objective, and quantitative manner

for the purpose of measuring variables, according to Kerlinger

(1964).

Results of the Study

For the purpose of presenting the findings in a synopsis form,

the sequence of the survey questions was changed to permit a

smoother flow of reporting responses. Appendix E provides an actual example of the survey instrument.

Among those institutions responding, 84 percent reported that they administer assessment tests to entering applicants. Although 84 percent reported that they administer assessment tests, only 49 percent of them use the results in program development. Fifteen percent indicated that they had no assessment program for entering applicants. Fifty-seven percent of the institutions had mandatory testing for all entering students and 27 percent listed testing as voluntary or advisory. Once identified, low ability students were required to take remedial work by 72 percent of the institutions responding. Twelve percent of the institutions did not require remedial work even though tests indicate such courses were needed. Although 74 percent of the institutions had standards for prerequisite courses, only 32 percent used assessment tests for advance placement (Table VI).

Sixty-seven percent of the respondents indicated that the institution had identified its primary goal for administering assessment tests, however, 17 percent had not. For those institutions that indicated that they had identified a primary goal, course placement was most frequently listed at 34 percent as the primary goal.

TABLE VI

SURVEY QUESTIONS DESIGNED TO DETERMINE ASSESSMENT
PROCEDURE AND USE OF TEST RESULTS

Item	Question	f	yes	f	No	f	UNK
1	Does your institution administer assessment tests to entering applicants? If the answer is no, please terminate the survey and return questionnaire	203	84%	37	15%		0
2	Is assessment testing mandatory for all entering students?	138	57%	65	27%		0
3	Once identified, are low ability students required to take remedial courses?	173	72%	20	12%		0
4	Does your institution use assessment tests for advance placement programs?	78	32%	125	52%		0
5	Are there standard prerequisites for course placement?	178	74%	11	4%	14	6%

Regarding the question of faculty support, 80 percent of the
respondents felt that the assessment program had faculty support,
three percent felt the faculty were not supportive of the assessment
program.

Seventy-six percent indicated that administrators supported the assessment program, however, nine percent felt that administrators were not supportive of the program.

The administration of the assessment test was conducted 47 percent of the time by Counselors, 22 percent of the time by the Teaching Staff, and 16 percent of the time by Faculty.

The assessment testing was conducted before, during, and after enrollment at many two-year institutions of higher education. However, 50 percent administer the test before enrollment, 18 percent during enrollment, and 16 percent after enrollment. Twenty-nine percent of the respondents indicated academic advisors as the primary decision makers in the use of assessment test results, followed by administrators at 28 percent, faculty at 17 percent, and academic deans at 11 percent (Table VII).

The American College Test (ACT), locally developed tests, high school transcripts, the Assessment Placement Service for Community Colleges (ASSET), and the Scholastic Aptitude Test (SAT) are the most widely used instruments to perform assessment testing at most of the institutions reporting. Table VIII presents in rank order a list of the instruments most frequently used.

TABLE VII

SURVEY QUESTIONS DESIGNED TO ASCERTAIN GOAL ESTABLISHMENT
AND ASSESSMENT ADMINISTRATION PROCEDURES

Item	Question	f	yes	f	No	f	UNK	Rank
6	Has your institution identified its primary goals for administering assessment tests?	161	67%	42	17%		0	
8	Have assessment practitioners at your institution secured the support of faculty members in the assessment program?	192	80%	7	3%	4	2%	
14	Do top administrators support the assessment program?	182	76%	21	9%		0	
15	Are assessment results used by top administrators in program development?	118	49%	55	23%	30	12%	
7	If your answer to question 6 is yes, please list the primary goal.							
	Course Placement	82	34%		0		0	1
	Increase Student Success Rate	34	14%		0		0	4
	Identify Academic Deficiencies	35	14%		0		0	3
	Retention	16	7%		0		0	5
	No Program	36	0%		15%		0	2
	Total	203	69%		15%			

TABLE VII (Continued)

Item	Question	f	yes	f	No	f	UNK	Rank
9	Who administers the assessment test at your institution?							
	Counselors	112	47%		0		0	1
	Testing Staff	53	22%		0		0	2
	Faculty	39	16%		0		0	3
		203	85%					
10	When are the assessment tests administered?							
	Before Enrollment	120	50%		0		0	1
	During Enrollment	44	18%		0		0	2
	After Enrollment	39	16%		0		0	3
		203	84%					
11	Who are the primary decision makers in the use of student assessment results?							
	Academic Advisors	71	29%		0			1
	Administrators	67	28%		0			2
	Faculty	40	17%		0			3
	Academic Dean	25	11%		0			4
		203	85%					

TABLE VIII

MOST FREQUENTLY USED INSTRUMENT FOR ADMINISTERING ASSESSMENT TEST

		Frequency Distribution		
Item	Question	f	%	Rank
12	ACT (American College Test)	88	21	1
	In-house Assessment Test	72	17	2
	High School Transcripts	60	14	3
	ASSET (Assessment/Placement Services for Community Colleges)	53	12	4
	SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)	48	11	5
	MAPS (Multiple Assessment Program and Services)	31	7	6
	Others	24	6	7
	Placement Test Only	17	4	8
	AAPP (Academic Assessment Placement Program)	13	3	9
	CTBS (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills)	8	2	10
	Comprehensive Outcome Assessment	7	2	11
	TASK (Test of Academic Skills)	4	1	12
	STAS (Standard Test of Academic Skills)	1	2	13
	Total	426	100	

To the question, "How long has your assessment program been in place?", 42 percent responded with five years or less, 21 percent responded with six to ten years, 13 percent responded with 11 or more years, and eight percent did not know the age of their program. Over 50 percent of the institutions reporting felt that adequate resources were provided to successfully administer a comprehensive student assessment program.

Mathematics, reading, English, and writing were the primary remedial programs offered by reporting institutions for low ability students. Twenty-one percent listed study skills and 13 percent listed free tutoring as additions to their basic math, reading, and English remedial programs. Surprisingly, two percent noted no programs at all for low ability students.

Adviser/counselor, administrators, and faculty were noted as institutional staff members who had access to student assessment information. Respondents indicated that access could be extended to other members on the institution's staff but strictly on a need to know basis (See Table IX for age, resources, and remedial programs).

In regard to question 19, "What percent of freshman return to your institution?," 95 percent was the highest return rate listed by respondents, 58 percent was the average and 20 percent was the lowest. Frequency distributions were listed for each freshman return rate category. Responses were analyzed in thirds to determine whether a relationship existed between freshman return rate and mandatory testing/placement. The analysis revealed a higher freshman return rate among those institutions with mandatory testing/placement than those institutions with voluntary testing/ placement (See Table X).

TABLE IX

SURVEY QUESTIONS DESIGNED TO DETERMINE AGE OF PROGRAM,
RESOURCES PROVIDED AND REMEDIAL PROGRAMS OFFERED

Item	Question	f	yes	No	UNK
13	How long has your assessment program been in place?				
	1 - 5 years	101	42%	0	0
	6 - 10 years	50	21%	0	0
	11 or more years	32	13%	0	0
	Answer unknown	20	0%	0	8%
		203	76%	0	8%
16	Does your institution provide adequate resources to successfully administer a comprehensive assessment program?		57%	22%	6%
17	What kinds of remedial programs are offered to students identified as low ability students?				
	Math	157	65%	0	0
	Reading	137	57%	0	0
	English	98	41%	0	0
	Writing	60	25%	0	0
	Study Skills	50	21%	0	0
	Tutoring	31	13%	0	0
	None	5	2%	0	0
18	What institutional staff members have access to student assessment information?				
	Advisor/Counselors	96	40%	0	0
	Faculty	47	20%	0	0
	Administrators	60	25%	0	0
		203	85%		

N=240

TABLE X

FRESHMAN RETURN RATE BY THIRDS

Item	Question		Percent
19	What is the percent of freshman returning at your institution?		
	Upper third	Highest	95
	Middle third	Average	58
	Lower third	Lowest	20

N=107

Table XI compares the freshman return rate of those institutions employing mandatory testing to those institutions using voluntary testing. Responses were divided into upper, middle, and lower thirds.

Table XII compares the freshman return rate of those institutions employing mandatory placement to those institutions using voluntary placement. Responses were divided into upper, middle, and lower thirds.

TABLE XI

FRESHMAN RETURN RATES EMPLOYING MANDATORY TESTING
AND VOLUNTARY TESTING

Returning Freshman	Mandatory Testing f	%	Voluntary Testing f	%	cum f
Upper 70% - 95%	23	77	7	23	30
Middle 44% - 69%	50	83	10	17	60
Lower 20% - 43%	8	47	9	53	17
Total	81		26		107

N=107

TABLE XII

FRESHMAN RETURN RATES EMPLOYING MANDATORY PLACEMENT
AND VOLUNTARY PLACEMENT

Returning Freshman	Mandatory Placement f	%	Voluntary Placement f	%	cum f
Upper 70% - 95%	23	77	7	23	30
Middle 44% - 69%	45	75	15	25	60
Lower 20% - 43%	8	47	9	53	17
Total	76		31		107

N=107

Table XIII presents, in rank order, a frequency distribution of all freshman return rate percentages reported by respondents at each two year institution of higher education participating in the study.

TABLE XIII

FREQUENCY DISTRIBUTION OF FRESHMAN RETURN RATE

%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f	%	f
95	1	80	6	65	5	50	12	35	2	20	1
94	0	79	1	64	2	49	0	34	0		
93	0	78	0	63	3	48	0	33	1		
92	0	77	0	62	2	47	0	32	0		
91	0	76	0	61	1	46	0	31	0		
90	2	75	6	60	14	45	4	30	5		
89	0	74	0	59	1	44	1	29	0		
88	0	73	0	58	1	43	0	28	0		
87	0	72	1	57	1	42	0	27	0		
86	0	71	0	56	0	41	0	26	0		
85	3	70	6	55	4	40	7	25	1		
84	0	69	0	54	2	39	0	24	0		
83	0	68	1	53	1	38	0	23	0		
82	1	67	1	52	1	37	0	22	0		
81	3	66	2	51	1	36	0	21	0		
XXXX	10		24		39		24		9		1x

Frequency Cumulative Total = 107

In regard to question 20, since the observed frequencies were so close numerically, "chi square" (X2) was computed to determine significance or whether the observed frequencies occurred by chance. See Table XIV for office initiating the assessment program.

TABLE XIV

OFFICE RESPONSIBLE FOR INITIATING THE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM

Item	Question	f	Yes	No	UNK
20	What office was responsible for initiating the assessment program?				
	Student Services	141	59%	0	0
	Institutions' Administration	32	13%	0	0
	State Legislature	10	4%	0	0
	Answer Unknown	20	0%	0	8%
		203	76%		8%

According to Mimium (1970) the basic formula for computing chi-square is as follows:

$$X^2 = \frac{(f_o - f_e)^2}{f_e}$$

$$X^2 = \frac{(59-25)^2}{25} + \frac{(13-25)^2}{25} + \frac{(4-25)^2}{25} + \frac{(8-25)^2}{25}$$

$$X^2 = 81.20 \quad \text{Significant } P < .005, \quad df = 3$$

The observed frequencies are significantly different from those which may be expected from chance. It is highly probable that the observed frequencies are not a change occurrence.

Of the 240 institutions answering the questionnaire, 71 percent felt that their assessment program accomplished its purpose. Thirty-seven percent felt that proper course placement was the primary purpose of the assessment program. Respondents felt the assessment accomplished its purpose because of accurately placement of students in remedial courses. Student grade point in selected classes was the major measure for judging the effectiveness of the student assessment program.

And, finally, according to the respondents, the primary means for improving current student assessment practices at two-year institutions of higher education was by initiating outcome assessment procedures. (See Table XV for respondent perception of the program effectiveness.)

TABLE XV

RESPONDENT PERCEPTION OF PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS

Item	Question	f	Yes	f	No	f	UNK
21	Do you believe that your assessment accomplished its purpose?	130	71%	20	8%	13	5%
22	If your answer to question 21 is yes, why? If no, why not?						
	Yes Responses						
	Accurate placement of students	98	41%		0		0
	Student success rate	44	18%		0		0
	Increased retention	24	10%		0		0
	Totals	166	69%				
	No Responses						
	Assessment not mandatory	13	0		5%		0
	Answer unknown	10	0		4%		0
	Lack of administrative support	9	0		4%		0
	Assessment purpose unclear	5	0		2%		0
	Totals	37			15%		
23	What factors are used to measure the effectiveness of your assessment program?						
	GPA in selected courses	89	37%		0		0
	Answer unknown	43	18%		0		0
	Goal completion	40	17%		0		0
	Student retention	31	13%		0		0
	Totals	203	85%				

TABLE XV (Continued)

Item	Question	f	Yes	f	No	f	UNK
24	What is the purpose of your assessment program?						
	To properly place students	89	37%		0		0
	Identify student deficiencies	56	23%		0		0
	Increase student success rate	37	15%		0		0
	Answer unknown	21	0%		0		9%
	Totals	203	75%				9%
25	How can current student assessment practices be improved?						
	Administer outcomes assessment	92	38%		0		0
	Greater administrative support	53	22%		0		0
	Answer unknown	43	0%		0		18%
	Mandatory placement	15	6%		0		0
	Totals	203	66%				18%

CHAPTER V

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary

The purpose of this study was to identify the current procedures utilized to assess the academic abilities of entering students at public two-year institutions of higher education in the southern United States.

Since "open door" two-year institutions of higher education attract such a highly diverse student population, assessment of a student's academic abilities has become a paramount issue. Legislative bodies, accrediting agencies and other outside groups are challenging two-year institutions of higher education to verify that they are doing a good job of assisting students in reaching their educational objectives. Outspoken critics of the two-year institution of higher education assert that students who attend these colleges receive a "second best" education. Strong and effective student assessment programs are the vehicle through which two-year institutions of higher education have chosen to silence their critics. Two-year college administrators maintain that comprehensive student assessment programs provide the means for fulfilling the mission of accepting low ability students, diagnosing their educational needs, and prescribing remedial education to assist them in reaching their educational goals.

Assessment practices used by two-year institutions of higher education to place students within college level or remedial work vary widely. Entry level placement standards for reading, writing, and mathematics vary from as low as the first percentile to as high as the 94th percentile.

Although increased interest in student assessment has come about at many two-year institutions of higher education, comprehensive assessment programs are yet to be employed on a large scale at these institutions.

The survey technique was used to gather data to identify the current assessment practices utilized by various two-year institutions of higher education. Four hundred survey questionnaires were mailed to various two-year institutions of higher education within the Southern Regional Education Board (SREB) Consortium to ascertain their current assessment practice with regard to entering applicants. Two hundred forty questionnaires were completed and returned for a 60 percent response rate.

Among those institutions responding, 84 percent reported that they administer assessment tests to entering applicants. Fifty-seven percent of the institutions have mandatory testing for all entering students.

The American College Test (ACT), locally developed placement tests, and high school transcripts are the most widely used instruments for assessment testing at most of the institutions reporting.

Mathematics, reading, English and writing were the primary remedial programs offered by reporting institutions for low ability students. Participant responses were tabulated and categorized. Categories were established utilizing the process of content analysis. Percentages were computed for all responses in each category.

Conclusions

The following conclusions were drawn.

The literature, as well as participant responses, indicated that a genuine effort was being made by two-year institutions of higher education to provide assessment testing and remedial programs for underprepared students. For the most part, assessment testing as two-year institutions of higher education is provided through the use of American College Test (ACT), locally developed placement tests, and high school transcripts.

It appeared that mandatory student assessment was preferred over voluntary assessment since more than half (57 percent) of the respondents indicated that their institution had recently instituted mandatory assessment practices. Another six percent said that instituting mandatory student assessment would enhance their assessment program.

Participant responses indicated that the assessment staffs perceived that their student assessment programs were effective for the most part, but could be improved. Favorable comments regarding outcome assessment led to the conclusion that a greater use

of outcome assessment was desirable.

Participant responses further indicated that mathematics, reading, English and writing were the primary remedial courses provided for entering students identified as academically underprepared. Although the above mentioned courses are beneficial, participant responses indicated that additional assistance was needed. Free tutoring, study skill updates and peer counseling could be helpful.

Although the study revealed no consistent method of assessing academic ability currently used by the participating institutions, there are promising signs on the horizon. State mandated assessment requirements presently exist, or are under consideration, in ten of the 15 states comprising the SREB Consortium. Further studies may reveal that there are consistent methods of student assessment at two-year institutions of higher education.

Recommendations for Practice

Due to the large number of underprepared students enrolled, two-year institutions of higher education need to be committed to providing help to such students in order to enable them to complete their educational goals. To fulfill this commitment, and based upon the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. It is recommended that two-year institutions of higher education develop strong assessment programs.

Two-year institutions of higher education have been criticized for allowing the "open door" to become a "revolving door." Two-year institutions of higher education can no longer afford to admit students without assessing their basic skills.

2. Two-year institutions of higher education should implement comprehensive student outcome assessment procedures in order to provide students with educational opportunities based upon their educational and social needs.

3. Assessment results should be used for more than just course placement. Research literature and participant responses indicated that comprehensive outcome assessment tests provide much information that can be useful in determining the student's educational objectives as well as academic abilities.

4. Adequate funds should be provided to successfully administer a comprehensive student assessment program. Only 57% of the respondents felt that adequate resources were provided for their program. Quality assessment programs need adequate resources to perform their functions.

5. Cut-off score levels on assessment tests should be evaluated to ensure that realistic and meaningful measures are obtained to diagnose student academic abilities. Respondents indicated that cut-off scores are too low in many cases.

6. Quality developmental/remedial programs should be provided that go beyond lower level reading, writing, and mathematics courses. Written responses on the survey instrument indicated that

many students could benefit from courses in goal setting and how to study techniques.

7. Free tutoring, as well as study skill updates, and learning labs should be provided in addition to the basic reading, writing, and mathematics courses.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. A study should be initiated to compare the effectiveness of comprehensive outcome assessment to that of placement testing with regard to student success rate and retention. Responses from the survey revealed a concern that placement testing alone did not provide enough information about student needs. Many felt comprehensive outcome assessment would enhance the assessment staff's ability to increase student success rate and improve retention.

2. A comparative study of the administration's perceptions versus assessment staff's perception about the effectiveness of the institutions' current assessment programs should be conducted. Comments from the survey indicated that administrator perception of the assessment program effectiveness was somewhat different than assessment staff perception.

3. A study comparing the cut-off levels on various assessment tests among various institutions within the same state shoudl be carried out. Research literature indicated that cut-off levels used to place students in remedial courses vary considerably between states. A study to determine whether the same variance

exits within states would be helpful.

Implications

The two-year institutions of higher education have been and will continue to be the major vehicles for the advancement of educational opportunities to many who would otherwise be excluded because of financial limitations, geographic location, or academic under-preparation. Nevertheless, two-year institutions of higher education can no longer afford to admit students without assessing their basic skills. To remain as viable institutions of higher education, and to maintain academic credibility, two year institutions of higher education need to institute stronger assessment and placement practices.

Legislative bodies as well as accrediting agencies proclaim that financial and human resources are too scarce to allow students the "right to fail." Mandatory assessment and placement procedures often raise a concern that colleges are screening underprepared students out of their institutions, but the continued practice of allowing students to enroll in courses for which they are unprepared for is an expensive disservice to the student. With mandatory assessment and placement, students are screened into the college for success. This issue continues to be volatile as was apparent in this study, but it is strongly recommended that two-year institutions of higher education review their assessment, advisement, and placement practices.

Due to the tremendous push for accountability, student assessment is here to stay. The important question may not be which approach is utilized to perform student assessment, but whether assessment data will be used, once obtained. After all the data are collected, it is imperative that institutions use them to assist students in reaching their goals, to improve instruction, and to ultimately produce real improvements in our system of higher education.

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APPENDIXES

APPENDIX A

TIME SCHEDULE FOR DEVELOPING INSTRUMENT

COLLECTING/ANALYZING DATA AND

REPORTING FINDINGS

<u>Date</u>   <u>Activity</u>

September, 1990   Instrument developed

October 11, 1990   Instrument pilot tested (pretest)

October 18, 1990   Instrument pilot tested (posttest)

January 19, 1991   Instrument field tested using target
                         institutions

February 11, 1991   Instrument mailed to participants

February 22, 1991   Follow-up letter to non-respondents

March 4, 1991   Analyze data

March 11, 1991   Report findings

APPENDIX B

LIST OF INSTITUTIONS INITIALLY REVIEWING

QUESTIONNAIRE

Name	Position	Institution
Marion Davis	Coordinatory of Testing	Eastern Oklahoma State College Wilburton, Oklahoma
Carrie Fowler	Counselor, Southeast Campus	Tulsa Junior Colelge Tulsa, Oklahoma
Suzanne Murphy	Director, Student Development	Rose State College Midwest City, Oklahoma

APPENDIX C

LIST OF TARGET INSTITUTIONS REVIEWING

QUESTIONNAIRE

Institution	Responded	Suggestions
Snead State Junior College Boaz, Alabama	Yes	None
Crowley's Ridge College Paragould, Arkansas	No	
Indian River Community College Fort Pierce, Florida	Yes	None
Dalton Junior College Dalton, Georgia	Yes	None
Maysville Community College Maysville, Kentucky	Yes	None
St. Bernard Parish Community College Chalmette, Louisiana	No	
Community College of Baltimore Baltimore, Maryland	No	
Mississippi Gulf Coast Community College Gautier, Mississippi	No	
Carteret Community College Morehead, City, North Carolina	Yes	None
Oklahoma City Community College Oklahoma City, Oklahoma	No	
Columbia Junior College Columbia, South Carolina	No	
Edmondson Junior College Chattanooga, Tennessee	Yes	None
Cedar Valley College Lancaster, Texas	Yes	None
Blue Ridge Community College Weyers Cave, Virginia	Yes	None
Potomac State College Keyser, Vest Virginia	No	

APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT LETTER

ROSE STATE COLLEGE
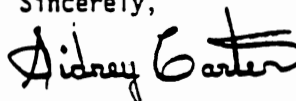
February 11, 1991

Dear Participant,

In addition to my work in Student Activities, I am a doctoral candidate at Oklahoma State University. My study examines how two-year institutions of higher education identify academic abilities of entering applicants.

Because of your special knowledge and expertise in student assessment, you have been selected to participate in this study along with several other assessment/placement practitioners from the Southern Regional Educational Consortium. Your responses will be held in strict confidence, and results will only be reported collectively.

This study will provide practical information to enhance current assessment practices at two-year institutions and develop success models for implementation. You will personally receive a summary of the results.

Your response is appreciated by February 20, 1991. A self-addressed stamped envelope is enclosed for your convenience in returning the survey. Thank you in advance for your valuable input and support.

Sincerely,

Sidney Carter
Director, Student Activities
Rose State College

APPENDIX E

ASSESSMENT SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

ASSESSMENT SURVEY
QUESTIONNAIRE

DIRECTIONS: Please respond to all items on the questionnaire. If an answer is unknown, so indicate by using the symbol UNK in the space provided.

NAME OF INSTITUTION   PUBLIC/PRIVATE INSTITUTION

_____   _____

Which most accurately describes the number of students in your institution?
0 to 5,000 _____   5,001 to 10,000 _____   10,001 or more _____

ASSESSMENT PROCEDURES

		YES	NO	UNK
1.	Does your institution administer assessment tests to entering applicants? (If answer is NO, please terminate survey at this point and return questionnaire)	___	___	___
2.	Is assessment testing mandatory for all entering students?	___	___	___
3.	Once identified, are low ability students required to take remedial courses?	___	___	___
4.	Does your institution use assessment tests for advanced placement programs?	___	___	___
5.	Are there standards for prerequisites for course placement?	___	___	___
6.	Has your institution identified its primary goal for administering assessment tests?	___	___	___

7. If your answer to question number six is yes, please list the primary goal.

_____

_____

8. Have assessment practitioners at your institution secured the support of faculty
members in the assessment program?   ___   ___   ___

9. Who administers the assessment tests at your institution?

_____

10. When are the assessment tests administered?   before enrollment ____   during enrollment ____   after enrollment ____

11. Who are the primary decision makers in the use of student assessment test results?

_____

12. Please indicate the type of instrument(s) utilized at your institution to perform assessment testing.
   SAT (Scholastic Aptitude Test)   ___
   ACT (American College Test)   ___
   MAPS (Multiple Assessment Program and Services)   ___
   STAS (Standard Test of Academic Skills)   ___
   AAPP (Academic Assessment Placement Program)   ___
   CTBS (Comprehensive Test of Basic Skills)   ___
   TASK (Test of Academic Skills)   ___
   ASSET (Assessment/Placement Services for Community Colleges) ___
   High School Transcripts   ___
   In-House Assessment Tests   ___
   Comprehensive Outcomes Assessment Tests   ___
   Placement Tests only   ___
   Others (please list)   ___

_____

_____

13. How long has your assessment program been in place?

ASSESSMENT PROGRAM SUPPORT	YES	NO	UNK
14. Do top administrators support the assessment program?	___	___	___
15. Are assessment results used by top administrators in program development?	___	___	___
16. Does your institution provide adequate resources to successfully administer a comprehensive student assessment program?	___	___	___

17. What kinds of remedial programs are offered by your institution to students identified as low ability students?

---

18. What institutional staff members have access to student assessment information?

ASSESSMENT PROGRAM EFFECTIVENESS	YES	NO	UNK

19. What is the percentage of freshmen returning at your institution? _____ %

20. What office was responsible for initiating the program?

---

21. Do you believe that your assessment program accomplishes its purpose? ___ ___ ___

22. If your answer to question number twenty-one is yes, why? If no, why not?

---

23. What factors are used to measure the effectiveness of your assessment program?

---

24. What is the purpose of your assessment program?

---

25. How can current student assessment practices be improved?

APPENDIX F

LETTER TO NON-RESPONDENTS

ROSE STATE COLLEGE

(405) 733-7379

February 21, 1991

Dear Participant,

Ten days ago I mailed you a survey instrument related to my research on examining how two-year institutions of higher education identify academic abilities of entering applicants.

So far, the response to this research has been very good. If you have completed and mailed your survey instrument, thank you for your rapid reply. If you have not yet had an opportunity to complete the instrument, I would appreciate you taking a few minutes to do so at your earliest convenience. Your participation is very important to the success of this project.

For your reply, I have enclosed a duplicate copy of the survey instrument and a stamped, self-addressed envelope. A response by February 27, 1991, would be appreciated.

Sincerely,

Sidney Carter
Director, Student Activities
Rose State College

VITA

Sidney Carter

Candidate for the Degree of

Doctor of Education

Thesis: CURRENT ASSESSMENT PRACTICES UTILIZED BY TWO-YEAR
INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION TO IDENTIFY ACADEMIC
ABILITIES OF ENTERING STUDENTS

Major Field: Occupational and Adult Education

Biographical:

  Personal Data: Born in Broken Bow, Oklahoma, June 3, 1944.
      Legal Name, Sidney Carter. Married to Barbara Ann
      (Holden) Carter, four children: Lakisha, Sidney, Jr.,
      Steve, and Mark.

  Education: Graduated from Dunbar High School, Broken Bow,
      Oklahoma, May 1962; received Associate of Arts degree in
      History from Eastern State College, Wilburton, Oklahoma in
      May 1964; received Bachelor of Arts degree in History from
      Langston University, Langston, Oklahoma in 1967; earned a
      Master of Education degree from Central State University
      in 1974 with emphasis in Guidance and Counseling;
      completed requirements for the Doctor of Education degree
      at Oklahoma State University, Stillwater, Oklahoma in
      December, 1991.

  Professional Experience: Teacher for the Oklahoma City Public
      School system, Oklahoma City, Oklahoma, January 1967;
      Served in the United States Air Force from August 1967 to
      July 1971; taught Social Studies for the Oklahoma City
      Public School system from August 1971 to May 1972;
      Director of Student Activities, Rose State College,
      Midwest City, Oklahoma, August 1972 to present.